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THE

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SERMONS PREACHED AND REVISED

BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

DURING THE YEAR 1884.

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VOL. XXX.

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C. H. SPURGEON AND THE TITLES OF SOME OF HIS WORKS, 1884.

TO

THE ONE GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH,

IN

THE TRINITY OF HIS SACRED PERSONS,

BE ALL HONOUR AND GLORY

WORLD WITHOUT END,

AMEN.

TO THE GLORIOUS FATHER, AS THE COVENANT GOD OF ISRAEL;

TO THE GRACIOUS SON, THE REDEEMER OF HIS PEOPLE;

TO THE HOLY GHOST, THE AUTHOR OF SANCTIFICATION;

BE EVERLASTING PRAISE FOR THAT GOSPEL OF THE FREE GRACE OF GOD

HEREIN PROCLAIMED UNTO MEN.

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C. H. Spurgeon at fifty years of age.

SPURGEON IN 1884 AT AGE 50.

CONTENTS.

No.		Page
1,757	The New Year's Guest	1
	"I was a stranger, and ye took me in."—Matthew xxv. 35.	
	"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."—John i. 12.	
1,758	The Pastor's Life Wrapped up with his People's Steadfastness. A Pleading Reminder for the New Year ...	7
	"Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."—1 Thessalonians iii. 8.	
1,759	The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption	15
	"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."—Romans viii. 15, 16.	
1,760	"He shall be Great"	25
	"He shall be great."—Luke i. 32.	
1,761	The Lord with Two or Three	37
	"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."—Matthew xviii. 20.	
1,762	High Doctrine and Broad Doctrine	49
	"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."—John vi. 37.	
1,763	Knowledge. Worship. Gratitude	61
	"So that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful."—Romans i. 20, 21.	
1,764	The Rocky Fortress and its Inhabitant	73
	"He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure."—Isaiah xxxiii. 15, 16.	
1,765	An Astounding Miracle	85
	"And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at	

No. Page

his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee."—Mark i. 21—28.

1,766 A Waiting God and a Waiting People 97

"And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him."—Isaiah xxx. 18.

1,767 Faith among Mockers 109

"He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him."—Psalm xxii. 8.

1,768 First King of Righteousness, and after that King of Peace 121

"First being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace."—Hebrews vii. 2.

1,769 Before Day-break with Christ 133

"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for therefore came I forth. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils."—Mark i. 35—39.

1,770 Recruits for King Jesus 145

"And there came of the children of Benjamin and Judah to the hold unto David. And David went out to meet them, and answered and said unto them, If ye be come peaceably unto me to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you: but if ye be come to betray me to mine enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it. Then the spirit came upon Amasai, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee. Then David received them, and made them captains of the band."—1 Chronicles xii. 16—18.

1,771 Putting the Hand upon the Head of the Sacrifice ... 157

"And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord."—Leviticus i. 4, 5.

No. Page

1,772 Slaying the Sacrifice 169

"And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord."—Leviticus i. 5.

1,773 What is your Life? 181

"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."—James iv. 14.

1,774 God's Work upon Minister and Convert 193

"But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."—Acts xxvi. 16—20.

1,775 "My Lord and my God" 205

"And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."—John xx. 28.

1,776 Unbinding Lazarus... 217

"And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."—John xi. 43, 44.

1,777 Esther's Exaltation; or, Who Knoweth? 229

"Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"—Esther iv. 13, 14.

1,778 A Heavenly Pattern for our Earthly Life 241

"Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."—Matthew vi. 10.

1,779 Grappling Irons 253

"Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth."—Psalm cxix. 88.

1,780 The Sprinkling of the Blood of the Sacrifice ... 265

"And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the vail of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation; and shall pour out all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation."—Leviticus iv. 6, 7.

No. Page

1,781 Two Pauls and a Blinded Sorcerer 277

"Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."—Acts xiii. 12.

1,782 The First Fruit of the Spirit 289

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love."—Galatians v. 22.

1,783 Pentecost 301

"The day of Pentecost."—Acts ii. 1.

1,784 Unbelief Condemned and Faith Commended 313

"They are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith."—Deuteronomy xxxii. 20.

"Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust."—Psalm xl. 4.

1,785 The Children and their Hosannas 325

"And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeased, and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"—Matthew xxi. 15, 16.

1,786 Our Sanctuary 337

"A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters. Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise."—Jeremiah xvii. 12, 13, 14.

1,787 Humility the Friend of Prayer 349

"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands."—Genesis xxxii. 10.

1,788 The Proof of our Ministry 361

"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"—2 Corinthians xiii. 3, 4, 5.

1,789 Joseph of Arimathæa 373

"Joseph of Arimathæa, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre."—Mark xv. 43—46.

No. Page

1,790 Receiving the Holy Ghost 385

"He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?"—Acts xix. 2.

1,791 Helps to Full Assurance 397

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."—1 John v. 13.

1,792 Understandest Thou what Thou Readest? 409

"And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth."—Acts viii. 30—33.

1,793 The Glory in the Rear 421

"And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night."—Exodus xiv. 19, 20.

"The glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward."—Isaiah lviii. 8.

"For the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward."—Isaiah lii. 12.

1,794 "Return, Return, O Shulamite; Return, Return!" ... 433

"Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies."—Solomon's Song vi. 13.

1,795 Pleading and Encouragement 445

"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?"—Ezekiel xviii. 23.

"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."—Ezekiel xviii. 32.

"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"—Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

1,796 Concerning Saints 457

"All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee."—Psalm cxlv. 10.

1,797 How to Meet the Doctrine of Election 469

"But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me."—Matthew xv. 24, 25.

No. Page

1,798 Sight for Those who See Not 481

"And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."—John ix. 39.

1,799 "Though He were Dead"... 493

"Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"—John xi. 24—26.

1,800 Heaven Below 505

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters."—Revelation vii. 16, 17.

1,801 The Parable of the Lost Sheep 517

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."—Luke xv. 4—7.

1,802 Thought-Reading Extraordinary 529

"Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear."—Psalm x. 17.

1,803 Jehovah-Jireh 541

"And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen."—Genesis xxii. 14.

1,804 Obadiah; or, Early Piety Eminent Piety 553

"I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth."—1 Kings xviii. 12.

1,805 Strength and Recovery 565

"And I will strengthen them in the Lord: and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord."—Zechariah x. 12.

1,806 A Summary of Experience and a Body of Divinity ... 577

"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."—1 Thessalonians i. 9, 10.

No. Page

1,807 A Call to the Lord's Own Flock 589

"Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God."—Ezekiel xxxiv. 30, 31.

1,808 The Threshing-Floor of Ornan 601

"At that time when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there."—1 Chronicles xxi. 28.

"Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel."—1 Chronicles xxii. 1.

1,809 May I? 613

"If I may."—Matthew ix. 21.

1,810 The Lion and the Bear: Trophies Hung Up 625

"Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."—1 Samuel xvii. 36, 37.

1,811 The Road to Honour 637

"Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."—1 Samuel ii. 30.

1,812 A Wonder Explained by Greater Wonders 649

"Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not."—Lamentations iii. 57.

1,813 Jonah's Resolve, or "Look Again" 661

"Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple."—Jonah ii. 4.

1,814 Commendation for the Steadfast 673

"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."—Revelation iii. 8, 10.

1,815 The Great Birthday and Our Coming of Age 685

"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."—Galatians iv. 3—6.

INDEX OF SCRIPTURE TEXTS.

VOLUME XXX.

Chap. & Verse.	Page
GENESIS.	
xxii. 14	541
xxxii. 10	349
EXODUS.	
xiv. 19, 20	421
LEVITICUS.	
i. 4, 5	157
i. 5	169
iv. 6, 7	265
DEUTERONOMY.	
xxxii. 20	313
I. SAMUEL.	
ii. 30	637
xvii. 36, 37	625
I. KINGS.	
xviii. 12	553
1 CHRONICLES.	
xii. 16—18	145
xxi. 28	601
xxii. 1	601
ESTHER.	
iv. 13, 14	229
PSALMS.	
x. 17	529
xxii. 8	109
xl. 4	313
cxix. 88	253
cxlv. 10	457
SOLOMON'S SONG.	
vi. 13	433
ISAIAH.	
xxx. 18	97
xxxiii. 15, 16	73
lii. 12	421
lviii. 8	421
JEREMIAH.	
xvii. 12, 13, 14	337
LAMENTATIONS.	
iii. 57	649
EZEKIEL.	
xviii. 23	445
xviii. 32	445
xxxiii. 11	445
xxxiv. 30, 31	589
JONAH.	
ii. 4	661
ZECHARIAH.	
x. 12	565

Chap. & Verse.	Page
MATTHEW.	
vi. 10	241
ix. 21	613
xv. 24, 25	469
xviii. 20	37
xxi. 15, 16	325
xxv. 35	1
MARK.	
i. 21—28	85
i. 35—39	133
xv. 43—46	373
LUKE.	
i. 32	25
xv. 4—7	517
JOHN.	
i. 12	1
vi. 37	49
ix. 39	481
xi. 24—26	493
xi. 43, 44	217
xx. 28	205
ACTS.	
ii. 1	301
viii. 30—33	409
xiii. 12	277
xix. 2	385
xxvi. 16—20	193
ROMANS.	
i. 20, 21	61
viii. 15, 16	15
2 CORINTHIANS.	
xiii. 3, 4, 5	361
GALATIANS.	
iv. 3—6	685
v. 22	289
1 THESSALONIANS.	
i. 9, 10	577
iii. 8	7
HEBREWS.	
vii. 2	121
JAMES.	
iv. 14	181
I. JOHN.	
v. 13	397
REVELATION.	
iii. 8, 10	673
vii. 16, 17	505

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE NEW YEAR'S GUEST.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY AFTERNOON, DECEMBER 16TH, 1883, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT MENTONE, BEFORE THE COMMUNION, TO A SMALL COMPANY OF BELIEVERS.

"I was a stranger, and ye took me in."—Matthew xxv. 35.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."—John i. 12.

I LATELY received a New Year's card, which suggested to me the topic on which I am about to speak to you. The designer of the card has, with holy insight, seen the relation of the two texts to each other, and rendered both of them eminently suggestive by placing them together. There is freshness in the thought that, by receiving Jesus as a stranger, our believing hospitality works in us a divine capacity and we thereby receive power to become the sons of God. The connection suggested between the two inspired words is really existent, and by no means strained or fanciful, as you will see by reading the context of the passage in John: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." So he was a stranger in the world which he himself had made. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." So he was a stranger among the people whom he had set apart for his own by many deeds of mercy. "But as many as received him,"—that is to say, gave entertainment to this blessed stranger—"to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." I thought that this might prove to be a suitable and salutary passage to discourse upon at the beginning of a New Year, for this is a season of hospitality, and some among our friends will think it well to commence a New Year by saying to the Lord Jesus, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?" This divine stranger has knocked at many doors, till his head is wet with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night; and now I trust there are some who will rise up and open unto him, so that at the end of the year they may say with Job, "The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveller." Verily, in so doing, you will not only entertain angels unawares; but you will be receiving the Lord of angels. The day in which you receive him shall be the beginning of years to you; it shall be the first of a series of years, which, whether they be few or many, shall be each one in the best sense *happy*.

I would say a few words, first, about *the stranger taken in;* and then, about *the stranger making strangers into sons.*

I. THE STRANGER TAKEN IN: this is a simile given to us by our Lord himself: a royal metaphor presented to us from his own throne. Note that the passage begins, "I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink;" these are two good works which prove faith in Jesus and love to him, and therefore they are accepted, recorded, and rewarded; but it is a distinct and memorable growth when it comes to, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." House-room is a larger gift than refreshment at the door. It is good believingly to do anything for Christ, however small; but it is a much better thing to give entertainment to Jesus within our souls, admitting him into our minds and hearts. We have not come to the full of what our Lord has a right to expect of us till, having given from our stores to him, by benefiting his poor and aiding his cause, we deliberately open the doors of our entire being to him, and instal him in our souls as an honoured guest. We must not be satisfied with giving him cups of cold water, or morsels of bread; but we must "constrain him, saying, Abide with us." Our hearts must be Bethanies, where, like Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus, we give our Master gladsome welcome: houses of Obed-edom, where the ark of the Lord may dwell in peace. Our prayer must be that of Abraham, "My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant."

The uppermost word of our text is *stranger*, and its light casts a hue of strangeness over the whole passage. Here are three strange things. The first is, *that the Lord Jesus should be a stranger here below.* Is it not a strange thing that "he was in the world, and the world was made by him," and yet he was a stranger in it? Yet is it not a whit more strange than true; for when he was born there was no room for him in the inn. Inns had open doors for ordinary strangers, but not for him; for he was a greater stranger than any around him. It was Bethlehem of David, the seat of the ancient family to which he belonged; but alas! he had become "a stranger unto his brethren, and an alien unto his mother's children," and no door was opened unto him. Soon there was no safe room for him in the village itself, for Herod the king sought the young child's life, and he must flee into Egypt, to be a stranger in a strange land, and worse than a stranger—an exile and a fugitive from the land whereof by birthright he was king. On his return, and on his public appearing, there was still no room for him among the mass of the people. He came to his own Israel, to whom prophets had revealed him, and types had set him forth; but they would have none of him. "He was despised and rejected of men." He was the man "whom men abhorred;" whom they so much detested that they cried, "Away with him! Crucify him! Crucify him!" Yea, the world so little knew him that they must needs hang up the Lord of glory on a cross, and put "the Holy One and the Just" to a felon's death. Jew and Gentile alike conspired to prove how truly he was a stranger; the Jew said, "As for this fellow, we know not from whence he is;" and the Roman asked him, "Whence art thou?" Now, that Christ should be such a stranger was indeed a sadly singular thing, and yet we need not wonder, for how should a wicked, selfish world know Jesus or receive him? The Lord's

own had been forewarned of this in ancient type, for long before the Lord appeared in the flesh he had shown himself as a stranger to the faithful. He came in angelic form to Abraham, and thus we read the story: "And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground. And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts." The Lord, who stands out in the centre of the three, was a stranger, and the father of the faithful entertained him, in type of what all the faithful of every age will do. This is he of whom Jeremiah said, "O the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" Yet with this fair warning it still remains sadly singular that, coming on an errand of mercy, our Lord should find so scant a welcome; should be so little known, so seldom recognized, so harshly entreated. Truly as Egypt made Israel to serve with rigour, so have we made this patient stranger to serve with our sins, and wearied him with our iniquities. The Son of man had not where to lay his head. Luke says the barbarians showed Paul and his friends no little kindness: but men were worse than barbarians to their Saviour. Shall the servant be better treated than his Master, or the disciple than his Lord? "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

Another strange thing is that *we should be able to receive the Lord Jesus as a stranger.* He has gone into the glory, and will he ever say of us, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in"? Yes, he will say so, if we render to him that spiritual hospitality of which he here speaks. This can be done in several ways.

Brethren and sisters in Christ, for such I trust you are, we can receive Christ as a stranger when believers are few and despised in any place. We may sojourn where worldliness abounds and religion is at a discount, and it may need some courage to avow our faith in Jesus. Then have we an opportunity of winning the approving word, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." There is a sure proof of love in receiving our Lord as a stranger. If the Queen desired again to visit Mentone, every villa would be gladly placed at her disposal; but were she driven from her empire, and reduced to be a poor stranger, hospitality to her would be a greater test of loyalty than it is to-day. When Jesus is in low esteem in any place, and he sometimes is so, let us be all the more bold to avow our allegiance to him. I fear that many professors take their colour from their company, and are hail-fellows with the irreligious and the unbelieving. These cry "Hosanna" with the multitude of the Lord's admirers, but in heart they have no love to the Son of God. Our loyalty to Christ must never be a matter of latitude and longitude; we must love him in every land, honour him when the many disregard him, and we must speak of him when all forget him.

Again, we have the Lord's own warrant for saying that if we show brotherly kindness to a poor saint we entertain the Lord himself. If we

see a sincere Christian in want, or despised, and ridiculed; and we say, "You are my brother; it matters not what garb you wear, the name of Christ is named on you, and I suffer with you. I will relieve your wants and share your reproach," then the glorious Lord himself will say to us at the last, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." It does seem passing strange, though I thus speak, that you and I should be still able to entertain our Lord, and yet it is so. We do not wonder that the righteous with a humble truthfulness exclaim, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in?" Neither are we ourselves free from admiring surprise. We also cry, "Will God in very deed dwell with men upon the earth? Will he accept hospitality at our hands?" It is even so.

Again, we may entertain the stranger Christ by holding fast his faithful word when the doctrines taught by himself and his apostles are in ill repute. Nowadays the truth which God has revealed seems of less account with men than their own thoughts and dreams, and they who still believe Christ's faithful word shall have it said of them, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." When you see revealed truth, as it were, wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, and no man saith a good word for it, then is the hour come to avow it because it is Christ's truth, and to prove your fidelity by counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. Oh! scorn on those who only believe what everybody else believes, just because they must be in the swim with the majority. These are but dead fish borne of the current, and they will be washed away to a shameful end. As living fish swim against the stream, so do living Christians pursue Christ's truth against the set and current of the times, defying alike the ignorance and the culture of the age. It is the believer's honour, the chivalry of a Christian, to be the steadfast friend of truth when all other men have forsaken it.

So, also, when Christ's precepts are disregarded, his day forgotten, and his worship neglected, we can come in, and take up our cross, and follow him, and so receive him as a stranger. To be sure, some will say, "Those people are fanatical Methodists, or straitlaced Presbyterians;" but what of that? It matters nothing to us what the world thinks of us, for we are crucified to it and it to us. If our Lord has laid down a rule, it is ours to follow it, and find rest unto our souls in so doing; ay, and a special rest in doing it, when by so doing we are securing that blessed sentence, "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." Death itself for his sake would be a small matter if thereby we secured that priceless word.

Once more, that spiritual life, which is the innermost receiving of Christ; that new life, which no man knows but he that has received it; that quickening of the Spirit, which makes the Christian as much superior to ordinary men as men are above dumb, driven cattle—if we receive that blessed gift, then shall we with emphasis be entertaining our Lord as a stranger. Profession is abundant, but the secret life is rare. The name to live is everywhere, but where is the life fully seen? To *be* rather than to talk, to *enjoy* rather than to pretend, to have Christ

truly within—this is not every man's attainment, but those who have it are among the God-like ones, the true sons of God.

A third strange thing is the fact that *Jesus will deign to dwell in our hearts.* Such a one as Jesus in such a one as I am! The King of glory in a sinner's bosom! This is a miracle of grace: yet the manner of it is simple enough. A humble, repenting faith opens the door, and Jesus enters the heart at once. Love shuts to the door with the hand of penitence, and holy watchfulness keeps out intruders. Thus is the promise made good, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Meditation, contemplation, prayer, praise, and daily obedience, keep the house in order for the Lord; and then follows the consecration of our entire nature to his use as a temple; the dedication of spirit, soul, and body, and all their powers, as holy vessels of the sanctuary; the writing of "Holiness unto the Lord" upon all that is about us, till our every-day garments become vestments, our meals sacraments, our life a ministry, and ourselves priests unto the Most High. Oh, the supreme condescension of this indwelling! He never dwelt in angel, but he resides in a contrite spirit. There is a world of meaning in the Redeemer's words, "I in them." May we know them as Paul translates them, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

II. A few words must suffice upon THE STRANGER MAKING STRANGERS INTO SONS. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Yes, beloved, the moment Christ is received into our hearts by faith we are no more strangers and foreigners, but of the household of God; for the Lord *adopts us* and puts us among the children. It is a splendid act of divine grace, that he should take us who were heirs of wrath, and make us heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Such honour have all the saints, even all that believe on his name.

There is more to follow: the designation of sons brings with it *a birth* into the actual condition of sons: the privilege brings with it the power, the name is backed up and warranted by the nature: for the Spirit of God enters into us when Christ comes, and causes us to be born again. To be adopted without being born again would be a lame blessing, but when we are both adopted and regenerated then have we the fulness of sonship, and the grace is made perfect towards us. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"; but this mysterious birth, which comes with the reception of Christ, makes us free, not only of the kingdom of God, but of the house and the heart of God.

Forget not that when the Lord Jesus enters our hearts, there springs up between us and him a living, loving, *lasting union,* and this seals our sonship: for as we become one with the Son we must be sons also. Jesus puts it, "My Father and your Father." It is the Spirit of his Son in our hearts by which we cry, "Abba, Father." "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." We are unto the Father even as Jesus is, as he says "thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me." Thus you see that in receiving Jesus we receive, as the Revised Version puts it, "the right to become the sons of God."

Yet once more: the practical reception of Jesus into the life becomes a proof to ourselves and others that we are the sons of God, for *it creates*

in us a likeness to God which is apparent and unquestionable. For look you, although Jehovah, our God, be incomprehensible and infinite, and his glory is inconceivable in its splendour, yet this fact we know of him, that in his bosom lies his Son, with whom he is always well-pleased. Look ye, when we receive Jesus into our bosom, as one with us, and when our joy and delight are in him, we do in that matter become like to the Father. Having thus with the Father the same object of love and delight, we are brought into fellowship with him, and begin to walk in the light, as he is in the light. A small window will let in the great sun; much more will Jesus, as the blessed meeting-place between our souls and God, let in the life, light, and love of God into our souls, making us like to God.

Moreover, having received Jesus, as a stranger, we feel a tenderness henceforth towards all strangers, for we see in their condition some resemblance to our own. We have love to all who like ourselves are strangers with God, and sojourners, as all our fathers were, and thus again we are made like to God, of whom it is written, "The Lord preserveth the strangers." Our God is "kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." Our Lord Jesus therefore bade us be the children of our Father which is in heaven, "For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." By becoming doers of good, we are known as children of the good God. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." A man is a son of God when he lives beyond himself by a thoughtful care for others; when his soul is not confined within the narrow circle of his own ribs, but goes abroad to bless those around him however unworthy they may be. True children of God never see a lost one without seeking to save him; never hear of misery without longing to bestow comfort. "Ye know the heart of a stranger," said the Lord to Israel; and so do we, for we were once captives ourselves, and even now our choicest Friend is still a stranger, for whose sake we love all suffering men. When Christ is in us we search out opportunities of bringing prodigals, strangers, and outcasts to the great Father's house. Our love goes out to all mankind, and our hand is closed against none: if it be so we are made like to God, as little children are like their father. Oh! sweet result of entertaining the Son of God by faith: he dwells in us, and we gaze upon him in holy fellowship; so that "we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." May we daily feel the power of Jesus within our hearts, transforming our whole character, and making us to be more and more manifestly the children of God. When our Lord asks concerning us, "What manner of men were they?" may even his enemies and ours be compelled to answer, "As thou art, so were they: each one resembled the children of a king." Then shall Jesus be admired in all them that believe, for men shall see in the children the divine stranger's handiwork.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PASTOR'S LIFE WRAPPED UP WITH HIS PEOPLE'S STEADFASTNESS.

A PLEADING REMINDER FOR THE NEW YEAR.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."—1 Thessalonians iii. 8.

MINISTERS, who are really sent of God, greatly rejoice in the spiritual prosperity of their people. If they see God's word prosper, they prosper; if the church of God is blessed, they are blessed. Their life is wrapped up in the spiritual life of their people. Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them to know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge. On the other hand, if God does not bless the word of his servants it is like death to them. To be preaching and to have no blessing makes them heavy of heart: the chariot-wheels are taken off, and they drag heavily along: they seem to have no power nor liberty. They get depressed, and they go back to their Master, with this complaint, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" He revives and cheers them, and they come back again to their service; but yet if they do not see a manifest blessing resting upon the people, they cry and sigh, and are like dying men. If the Lord willed to do so, he might have made automatons to preach; and these would only need to be wound up, and to be allowed to run down again; they would have known no feelings of joy or of sorrow, and would have been invulnerable to the arrows of grief. We have heard of the Iron Duke; iron preachers would have been enduring instruments, and would never have been laid aside by mental depression.

But the sympathy of the preacher is God's great instrument for blessing the hearer. If you read a sermon in a book it is good; but if you hear it preached fresh from the man's heart, it is far more effective. There is a living fellow-feeling about it, and that is the power which God has in all ages been pleased to use—the power of a spirit which God has made sensitive with affection, so sensitive that it rises to joy when its affectionate purpose is accomplished, and sinks to depths of grief when that purpose fails. This, I take it, is what the apostle means when he says, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." The people can make the pastor happy beyond expression by their being rich

in grace and happy in Christ; but they can make him miserable beyond all description if they are either unstable or insincere.

Dearly beloved, I have often rejoiced in God as I have seen the work of the Spirit among you. It is no small joy that for many years we have never been without an increase to the church. With few exceptions we have never gathered at our monthly communions without receiving a considerable number into our membership. During these years some have turned back, to our great sorrow, and some have flagged, to our solemn grief; but others have persistently carried on the work of God, and have developed gifts and graces which have made them qualified for larger spheres; so that at this day those at home come behind in no gift, and those abroad do not forget the hallowed training of Zion. In every part of the earth some are engaged in holy service who have gone out from this church. For all this our heart must be grateful. But these are evil times; these are times the like of which I have not before seen, in which the foundations are removed, and "what shall the righteous do?" The winds are out. The tacklings are loosed. The mariners reel to and fro. Everything seems drifting. Men know not where they are. Half the professing Christians of the present day do not know their heads from their heels, and the half that do know seem inclined to take to their heels and run, rather than stand steadfast in the faith and wait till evil days are over. It is time that we spoke to you concerning steadfastness, that you be not like idle boys, that leap hedges and ditches after every nest that silly birds may choose to make; but that you keep to the King's highway of holiness and truth, and hold fast to the doctrines and the practices which are taught us in the word of God. I say to you by this discourse, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." It is a matter of life and death to us that you should be rooted, grounded, and settled.

Notice first, that *some are not in the Lord;* secondly, *some appear to be in the Lord, but they are not standing fast;* and thirdly, that *some in the Lord stand fast in the Lord*, and these are our life: "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

I. First, SOME ARE NOT IN THE LORD AT ALL. A solid mass of infidelity and godlessness hems us in. Our heart is heavy, because this great city is determined to shut its eyes to the light. There are streets upon streets in which none attend the house of God; and we have it on credible information, that, in certain districts, if one man in a street is seen to go regularly to a place of worship, his neighbours mark him as a singular being. The home-born Londoner of the working classes, as a rule, has no care for the place of worship. If I were living in the country I think I would be content with but half a wage sooner than come and dwell in this ungodly place. Our members try to bring up their children in God's fear, but they are often compelled to quit their homes because of the filthy conduct of those who defile our streets. Yet this is not my present theme.

Our greater sorrow is that there are many who hear the gospel and are not in the Lord. We are not sorry that they should come to hear the word; would to God that all Christless souls would hear of Christ! But we are sorry that they have come month after month, year after year, and have received no saving benefit. I still meet here and there

with those who tell me, "I used to hear you in Park-street, and Exeter Hall;" and yet I gather from them that they are undecided. I have small hope for them if thirty years of ministry have not brought them to Christ. At any rate these many years add to the dreadful probability that they will continue to make the word of God to be unto themselves a savour of death unto death. If I could pick out of this audience to-night, by infallible guidance, one man or one woman, and could point to that person and say, "Such a one will certainly go down to hell to endure the everlasting wrath of God"; and if you knew that I was speaking like a prophet from God, and that it was certainly so, you would turn round and look with deepest grief upon that doomed soul. You would shudder to be sitting in the same pew. And yet though, thank God, we may not speak with that certainty, the probability grows so great as almost to amount to a certainty concerning those upon whom entreaties have been wasted, upon whom expostulations have been wasted, by whom invitations have been refused, that they will continue to harden their hearts until at last they sink into the place where mercy never enters.

Ah, Lord, these are heavy tidings, and thy saints feel them! I know I am speaking to many who deeply sympathize with me when I say, that the thought of this is a worm that makes our joys decay—I mean the thought that some of you contribute to God's work, and are in many points excellent, and yet you lack the one thing needful, and after having joined with God's people in outward acts of devotion you will be driven from his presence for ever. O infinite mercy, grant that it may not be so, but may these men and women even now be led to believe in Jesus and be saved! We die when we think of those who are not in the Lord at all. How it would revive us if we could see them saved!

If there be a deadening influence about the thought that some few among us are not converted, think of what the effect must be upon a minister's mind if he shall have laboured long and seen no fruit. There may be instances in which a man has been faithful, but not successful; places where, for a time, the dew falls not, and the softening influences of the Spirit are not given. Then the soil breaks the ploughshare, and the weary ox is ready to faint. I began to preach while yet a youth, scarce sixteen years of age, but before I had preached half a dozen times I saw persons affected by those sermons. I pined to find some heart that had looked to Jesus while I had preached him; and I have photographed upon my eye-balls at this very moment a very humble clay-walled cottage which seemed to me to be a sacred spot, for I was told by a venerable deacon that it was the house of a poor woman who had sought and found the Saviour through my ministry. I did not let the week conclude till I had seen her, for I hungered for the joy of meeting with one whom I had brought to Christ. If I found one soul converted I took heart and looked for more. Brother, are you working for Jesus? Then you know what it is to feel the shadow of death when you do not win a soul. Does it not seem hard to be knocking for Christ against a door that never opens, but has fresh bolts put to it to keep it closed? Be not ashamed of yourself because you feel distressed; it proves your capacity for being used. By-and-by God will bless you, and then you will understand the text "Now we live." You will find that your pulse is quickened, your heart's

blood warmed, your soul filled with a diviner life as you rise nearer to the dignity of a saviour of men, and taste the joys unspeakable for which Christ laid down his life.

II. We notice, secondly, that THERE ARE SOME WHO PROFESS TO BE IN CHRIST, BUT THEY CERTAINLY ARE NOT STANDING FAST. This is a Marah—a bitter well; this is a source of heart-break and of sore tribulation to the servant of God in whom the Spirit of God dwells, namely, that, first, there are many over whom we rejoice who, nevertheless, *altogether apostatize*. Use the best judgment that you can, there will be some added to a church who are not really the Lord's people. They do run well; "what doth hinder them that they should not obey the truth?" They appear to begin in the Spirit, yet by-and-by they attempt to be made perfect in the flesh. Oh, foolish ones, "Who hath bewitched you?" They seem to be all that we want them to be for a time, but soon they are nothing that they should be: and this does not happen merely during the first six months or so, else might we set them on probation; but, alas, it has happened to men that have grown grey in the church, esteemed and honoured, and yet they have fallen till their names cannot be mentioned without sorrow. We can never feel sufficiently grateful to our Lord for allowing a Judas to be among the twelve, for thus, he himself bore what has been to his servants the most crushing of griefs. The man that went to the house of God in company with us has betrayed, not us alone, but our Master, and the truth. This has often happened in the history of the church, and therefore *we* may expect it; but whenever it comes it is a stab to the very soul, and Paul, I think, if he were here, would say, "Now we die, because these men do not stand fast in the Lord." Happy am I to have been so largely spared this heart-wounding calamity. Oh, my brethren, we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord; but it is as death to us if you turn aside!

But there are other forms of instability. Many do not behave in such a way that we could remove their names from the church-roll; but they *decline in grace*. Far too many grow worldly, and it is especially the case when they grow wealthy. Well did one say to me the other day who has risen to riches, "I almost regret that I have ever changed my position, for I find my difficulties wonderfully increased—my difficulties especially with my family. They ask for things now in the form of amusements which they never would have thought of if I had not become wealthy." When a man toils and moils to heap riches together he is laboriously endeavouring to make it difficult for him to be saved; yet some think that the main object of life is to load themselves so that they cannot easily follow after Christ. It is poor progress to grow rich in gold but poor in grace.

We see others whom we look upon as likely to be leaders and helpers, who, if not from this cause yet from some other, are *diverted from the work of God*. We do not now expect to see them at the prayer-meeting: it would be rather astonishing if they came in. We do not now expect them to conduct a tract society, or a lay-preaching association, or a Sunday-school; for they are careless as to the salvation of souls. We know some who were once full of zeal; but now they are neither cold nor hot. These may seem trifles to the thoughtless, but they are not trifles

to those who watch after their souls, and will have to give an account. Whenever I have seen it I have said to myself, "How much of this is due to me? How much must I blame myself for this?" And one cannot answer that question immediately. Many thoughts and searching considerations are needed; but, believe me, there is nothing which eats more like a sharp acid into a man's inmost soul to cause him a daily grief than when he sees those that profess to be servants of Christ not answering to the processes of grace, but acting like worldly men. There are some of whom I must speak even weeping, because they vex our spirit by their neglect of their Master's business.

In these days there are other forms of this lack of steadfastness, and they come up in this way. Some are always *shifting their doctrinal opinions.* Within the last ten years we have had the most remarkable selection of abominations in the way of new doctrines that ever cursed our human race. If all the heresies that have been vamped were true, I do not know whether there would remain either heaven, or hell, or earth, or God, or man, for all these have been removed by the foul finger of doubt. Some go in not so much for disbeliefs as for fanaticisms; and, believing nothing one day, the world is to believe everything the next. We have already miracles restored to us, and a daring person has arisen who assumes the name of Christ. A bottomless pit of fanaticism is yawning. Hell from beneath is vomiting all manner of absurdities to vex the church of God. Now is the time for steadfastness. It is a blessed thing for a man to know what he does believe, and to hold it; to have no ear for novelty-mongers, but to say, "If it be new it is not true. I have my colours nailed to the mast, and I cannot take them down."

We know some who are not *steadfast in their service of Christ.* When a man claims to be perfect he is wholly useless to us: he is sure to leave his work. He wants all his time to admire his own perfections. It is not possible for him to be of any further service among such poor sinners as we are, and off he goes to stand by himself and say, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are." I would a great deal sooner remain imperfect and be of some use to God and man, than brag of my excellence and do nothing. Brethren, stick to your work for God. If you preach, preach on. If called to teach in the Sunday-school, at your peril leave your class. If God has bidden you go from door to door with tracts, stick to it; and when the Lord himself shall come, you cannot be found in a better attitude than in that of discharging the offices to which he has called you. He would not have us stand with our mouths wide open gazing into the air. The best attitude for a servant when his Master comes is to be found doing his Master's will.

We live, if ye stand fast in the Lord as to doctrine and as to holy service, and especially we live if the Lord keeps you, dear brethren, *true in the matter of holy conversation.* I call that holiness which minds its work at home. I call that holiness which makes a kind father, a true brother, an obedient child, and makes me mind my daily calling, and see that there I make others happy and so commend the gospel to them. See to it that your personal characters in secret before God, and at home before your friends, and outside in the world, where eagle eyes watch to perceive your infirmities, are spotless and unblameable; for then we live.

But when men can turn round and fling in our teeth "These are your Christians, and they deal as others deal, and talk as others talk," then down goes our spirit, and we wish we could die. It is life to lead a band of earnest steadfast men who know the truth, and live the truth, and are ready to die for the truth. This is an honour of which we feel we are unworthy, though we aspire to it. But to lead inconsistent, dubious, half-hearted, idle people onward to some imaginary goal, is a doom compared with which death itself is light.

Now, dear brothers and sisters, the reason why every true minister sinks in heart when those who seem to be in Christ do not stand fast is this—that unless men are steadfast *the church is weakened.* The strength of any church must be the aggregate of the strength of all the members put together; therefore if you have a set of weak brethren you multiply the weakness of each one by the number of the membership. What a hospital is the result! If each believer be strong, then the whole church is strong; and that is our desire: we pine to see the church of God vigorous in her holy calling. If believers are steadfast, then God is glorified. Transient piety brings no glory to God. God is not honoured by that religion which is taken up to-day and laid down to-morrow. It is only by perseverance—ay, and perseverance to the end, that glory is brought to God.

The minister is disappointed of his reasonable expectations when men do not stand fast. He is like a farmer who sees the seed grow, but just when it is about to yield him a crop he spies out black smut, and his wheat is blighted. He may well weep over the fact that it went so far and yet failed so utterly. Judge, ye mothers, what it is to nurse your children till they are near to manhood, and then to see them sink into the grave. You have wished perhaps that you had been childless sooner than see your dear offspring taken from you thus. Very similar is the sorrow of the true pastor: when he expects that God will be glorified by his converts they turn aside, and his work is lost; or if they do not turn aside unto perdition, yet if they are unstable their joy is lessened and their usefulness is marred, and this is no small thing. We live in your joy, and if you miss it we grieve for your incalculable loss; for believe me there is no joy like the highest form of Christianity, and to lose this is a catastrophe. The beginnings of piety are often bitter; and difficult advances are often made through the sea and through the terrible wilderness; but the higher stage of piety is the Beulah land from which you look into the paradise of God, yourself living on the borders of it. If any child of God should miss the highest joy it is a grief most heavy to those who watch for their souls. Wherefore be ye steadfast, for so we live.

III. Then THERE ARE SOME WHO ARE IN THE LORD AND WHO STAND FAST IN THE LORD, and these are our life.

They are our life, because their holy conduct fills us with living confidence. I tell you, brethren, when I have seen the holy generosity of members of this church, making sacrifices to serve the Lord; when I have seen the holy courage of brethren standing up for Jesus, and bearing reproach for the sake of principle, and speaking out the truth in defiance of ridicule; when, in fact, I have seen many things that I will not mention now—I have said to myself these are fruits that could

not have been produced except by the truth and by the Spirit of God. Then have I felt very confident in the gospel which has been so adorned by your actions. Certain of our beloved elders and deacons passed away, to our deep sorrow, not very long ago, and when I came down from their death-chambers I did not require any further argument to prove the religion of the Lord Jesus: the Holy Spirit set his seal upon the truth by their joyful departures. If infidels had met me as I left those choice death-beds, I should not have argued with them for a single moment; I should have simply laughed them to scorn, for I should have felt like a man that has looked at the sun till he cannot bear the blaze of it any longer, and then hears a blind man swear that there is no sun. With what confidence we speak when holy lives and joyful deaths prove the gospel!

Again, how often have I seen fears which have crept into my soul disappointed by my dear people! This is a time of fear, when all Solomon's men that keep watch about his bed had need each one to carry his sword drawn because of fear in the night. Yet, when I have seen God's people steadfast, my fears have fled. Yes, I have said, the Lord keepeth the feet of his saints. He is as a wall of fire round about his own. If it were possible, the powers of evil would deceive the very elect; but it is not possible. The saints are steadfast, and each steadfast one cheers his minister, and helps him to lay aside his anxieties, and to rejoice in the certainty that the gospel will triumph.

The steadfast become our life by stimulating us to greater exertion. I believe that the steadfast help the minister to a high degree of usefulness. When the man of God sees his people living to God at a high rate of piety, he speaks many things which otherwise he never would have spoken. He glories in the work of God, and with no bated breath or trace of hesitation, he points to his people, and cries, "See what God has done!" He exults over his converts with a holy joy. He cries, "See what they used to be and what they are now! See how life has been made to spring up in the midst of death, and how light shines where aforetime darkness reigned." Take away the living evidences of divine power from the church, and you lower the preacher's spirit at once, and deprive him of power to demonstrate his commission by the signs that follow it.

I am sure, dear friends, you would have a deadening influence on me if you were not steadfast in holiness. How can I preach up holiness if some one sitting in the gallery looks down and says, "Yonder is one of his members, and a worse thief I do not know!" Can I preach up the glory of grace when some one cries, "Fine talk; but I saw one of the members of his church half seas over the other night. Is that what is meant by the free spirit?" If behind me there is a regiment of deceivers and hypocrites, my position is horrible. Surely I had better give over the preaching of the gospel when *you* give over the living of the gospel. My task, in itself difficult, is rendered absolutely impossible if while I preach one thing you live another. Happily it has not been so among you, and you will not permit it to be so in the future. May God of infinite mercy grant to me that I may live, because Christ lives in you; that I may be strong because I can fall back upon you as my "living epistles, known and read of all men!" Of godly established

Christians, I may quote the words of David, "Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: he shall speak with the enemies in the gate." The best answer to all the opponents of the old-fashioned gospel is the godly zeal of an earnest church. "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

I had many things to say unto you, but my time has gone. Only may God the Holy Ghost dwell with the preacher that he may preach the Lord Jesus, and not himself: and may the Spirit of God dwell with you, dear members of this church, that you may live under his bedewings, and may bear his fruit unto the glory of God. As for you that are members of other churches, the Lord make you to be to your own pastors their joy and crown; it will be ill for you if in the day of judgment they have to give an ill account of you. We do not think enough about that trial which each man will have to undergo, or of that account which all under shepherds will have to render in the last great day. It is written "If the watchman warn them not they shall perish, but their blood will I require at the watchman's hands." Oh, my Master, when thou searchest my garments for the blood of souls, grant that I may be found clear of the blood of all men. What a heaven this will be!

Remember that other word, "If the watchman warn them, and they take no heed of the warning, they shall perish; but he has delivered his soul." May every one of us take care to deliver his soul! It is my highest prayer to be able to make full proof of my ministry, that in all of you I may have an unquestioned testimony to my life-long fidelity to my Lord, and to your souls. Pray for me daily, and for yourselves also, that by our steadfastness this favoured church may be made to live and flourish till our Lord himself shall come.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Thessalonians i.; ii. 18 to iii. 13.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—686, 667, 684.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE AND OF ADOPTION.

A Sermon,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."—Romans viii. 15, 16.

THESE two verses are full of the word "spirit," and they are also full of spiritual truth. We have read in previous verses about the flesh and of the result that comes of minding it, namely, death. But now, in this verse, we get away from the flesh, and think only of the work of the Holy Spirit upon our spirits, and of the blessed privilege which comes of it—"that we should be called the sons of God." We cannot enter into this except by the power of the Holy Spirit, for spiritual truth must be spiritually discerned: our eyes need God's light, and our spirits need the Holy Spirit's quickening. We breathe our prayer to the Great Spirit that he would make us feel the full meaning of his word.

I think that I see in the text the fourfold work of the Spirit: first, *the spirit of bondage;* secondly, *the spirit of adoption;* thirdly, *the spirit of prayer,*—here it is, "Whereby we cry." And fourthly, *the spirit of witness:* "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

I. Consider, first of all, THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE. *Much of the bondage in which we are plunged by our fallen nature is not the work of the Spirit of God at all.* Bondage under sin, bondage under the flesh, bondage to the fashions and customs of the world, bondage under the fear of man,—this is carnal bondage, the work of the flesh, and of sin, and of the devil. But there is a sense of bondage, to which, I think, the apostle here mainly alludes, which is of the Spirit of God. Before the Spirit of God within us becomes the Spirit of liberty, he is, first of all, the Spirit of bondage. The Spirit is not first a quickening Spirit to us, but a withering Spirit:—"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass." The divine Spirit wounds before he heals, he kills before he makes alive. We usually draw a distinction between law-work and gospel-work; but law-work is the work of the Spirit of God, and is so far a true gospel-work that it is a frequent preliminary to the joy and peace of the gospel. The law is the needle, which draws

after it the silken thread of blessing, and you cannot get the thread into the stuff without the needle: men do not receive the liberty wherewith Christ makes them free till, first of all, they have felt bondage within their own spirit driving them to cry for liberty to the great Emancipator, the Lord Jesus Christ. This sense or spirit of bondage works for our salvation by leading us to cry for mercy.

Let us notice that *there is a kind of bondage which is, in part at least, the work of the Spirit of God*, although it is often darkened, blackened, and made legal in a great measure by other agencies which do not aim at our benefit. That part of the bondage which I shall now describe is altogether the work of the Spirit of God. That is, first, *when men are brought into bondage through being convinced of sin.* This bondage is not the work of nature; certainly, never the work of the devil. It is not the work of human oratory, nor of human reason; it is the work of the Spirit of God; as it is written, "When the Spirit of truth is come, he shall convince the world of sin." It needs a miracle to make a man know that he is in very deed a sinner. He will not own it. He kicks against it. Even when he confesses the outward transgression, he does not know or feel the inward heinousness of his guilt, so as in his soul to be stunned, and confounded, and humbled, by the fact that he is a rebel against his God. Now, no man can ever know a Saviour without knowing himself a sinner: even as no man can value a physician while he is ignorant of the existence and evil of disease. By the killing sentence of the law we are bruised, and broken, and crushed to atoms, as to all comeliness and self-righteousness. This, I say, is the work of the Spirit of God; he worketh a necessary spirit of bondage within us by putting us under a sense of sin.

The Spirit of God is always the Spirit of truth, and therefore he only convinces men of that which is true: he puts them into no false, or fanciful, or needless bondage. "When the Spirit of truth is come, he shall convince the world of sin,"—because it is sinful. When the Spirit puts men into bondage because they are sinners, he only puts them into their right place. When he came to some of us by the law he made us feel what we were by nature; and what we felt and saw was the truth. He made us see things as they really were. Until he came, we put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness; but when the Spirit of truth was come, then sin appeared sin. Then we were in bondage, and it was no fancied slavery, but the very truth.

The Spirit of God also brought us farther into bondage when he *made us feel the assurance that punishment must follow upon sin*, when he made us know that God can by no means clear the guilty, and that he was not playing with us when he said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." We were made to feel the sentence of death in ourselves, that we might not trust in ourselves. At that time we trembled on the brink of fate. We wondered that we were not already in hell. We were so convinced of sin that it was a matter of astonishment to us that the sentence did not immediately take place upon us. We were speechless before God, as to excuse or justification. We could not offer anything by which we could turn away the edge of justice, though we saw it like a glittering sword stripped of the scabbard of almighty patience. Do you know what this means? I can hardly hope that you will prize the

atonement, or feel the sweetness of the expiation by blood, unless, first of all, you have felt that your soul's life was due to God on account of your transgressions. We must know a shutting-up under the sentence of the law, or we shall never rejoice in the liberty which comes to us by grace through the blood of the Lamb of God. Blessed be the Spirit of God for working in us this double sense of bondage, first making us know that we are guilty, and, secondly, making us feel that the justice of God must punish us for sin.

And then, further, the Spirit of God operates as a spirit of bondage upon the hearts of those whom God will save, by bringing them to *feel the utter impossibility of their hoping to clear themselves by the works of the law.* We heard this sentence thundered in our soul—"By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." We could not meet our God under the law: we looked up to Sinai's fiery summit, whereon the Lord revealed himself, and we felt that its crags were too steep for our tottering feet to climb. Even if the way were smooth, how could we dare to pass through the thick darkness, and hold communion with Jehovah, who is a consuming fire? The Spirit of God once for all weaned us from all thought of a righteousness of our own. We were clean divorced from the legal spirit, and compelled to abhor the very notion of justifying ourselves in the sight of a pure and holy God by our works, or feelings, or prayers. This was the work of the Spirit of God.

This result is always produced in every child of God, but not always by the same degree of bondage. Fetters of different weights are used in this prison-house, as wisdom and prudence appoint. The spirit of bondage comes not to all alike; for some find peace and life in a moment, and come to Calvary as soon as Sinai begins to thunder.

I have known this spirit of bondage come with great force to men who have been open transgressors. Others who have been kept by the preventing grace of God from the extremes of open sin have not felt so much of it; but men that have blasphemed God, broken the Sabbath, and violated every holy thing,—when they are brought before God under a sense of sin, have frequently had a hard time of it. See how Saul was three days blinded, and did neither eat nor drink. Read John Bunyan's "Grace Abounding," and notice the five years of his subjection to this spirit of bondage. It must in his case be noted that his bondage was far from being altogether the work of the Spirit, for much of it arose from his own unbelief. But still there was in the core and heart of it a work of the Spirit of God most wonderfully convincing him of sin. I should not wonder if some of my hearers, who may have gone far into outward transgression, are made to feel, when brought to spiritual life, great grief and humiliation under a sense of their sin.

Such bondage often happens to those who, as the old authors used to say, were "close sinners"—men who did not even know that they were sinners at all, but, in consequence of their morality and the strictness of their lives, had a high conceit of their own excellence in the sight of God. Certain of these people experience most fearful convictions of sin: as if God would say to each one, "I must rid thee of thy self-righteousness. I must cure thee of trusting in thy moral life; and therefore I will let thee see into the depths of thy depravity. I will

discover to thee thy sins against light and knowledge, thy sins against conscience, thy sins against the love of God. Thou shalt be brought into sore bondage; but that bondage shall heal thee of thy pride."

I have noticed one thing more, and that is, that those who are in after life to be greatly useful are often thus digged, and tilled, and dunged, in order that much fruit may be brought forth by them in after years. I have had to deal with as many troubled souls as any living man, and God has greatly used me for their deliverance; but this never could have happened, so far as I can judge, unless I had myself been the subject of a terrible law-work, convincing me not only of my actual sin, but of the source of that sin, namely, a deep and bottomless fountain of depravity in my own nature. When I have met with persons driven to despair, and almost ready to destroy themselves, I have said, "Yes, I understand all that: I have been in those sepulchral chambers, and can sympathize with those who are chilled by their damps. I know the heart of a stranger, for I also was a captive in Egypt, and worked at the brick-kilns." In such a case this bondage of spirit becomes a profitable preparation for after work. The sword that has to cut through coats of mail must be annealed in many fires; it must endure processes which a common blade escapes. Do not, therefore, all of you expect that the spirit of bondage will be seen in you to the same degree; for, after all, it is not the spirit of bondage which is to be desired for its own sake, but that which comes after it—the Spirit of liberty in Christ Jesus.

Our text reminds us that *the result of this spirit of bondage in the soul is fear:*—"The spirit of bondage to fear." There are five sorts of fears, and it is well always to distinguish between them.

There is the natural fear which the creature has of its Creator, because of its own insignificance and its Maker's greatness. From that we shall never be altogether delivered; for with holy awe we shall bow before the divine majesty, even when we come to be perfect in glory.

Secondly, there is a carnal fear: that is, the fear of man. May God deliver us from it! May we never cease from duty because we dread the eye of man! Who art thou that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die? From this cowardice God's Spirit delivers believers.

The next fear is a servile fear—the fear of a slave towards his master, lest he should be beaten when he has offended. That is a fear which should rightly dwell in every unregenerate heart. Until the slave is turned into a child he ought to feel that fear which is suitable to his position. By means of this fear the awakened soul is driven and drawn to Christ, and learns the perfect love which casts it out.

If servile fear be not cast out it leads to a fourth fear, namely, a diabolical fear; for we read of devils, that they "believe and tremble." This is the fear of a malefactor towards the executioner, such a fear as possesses souls that are shut out for ever from the light of God's countenance.

But, fifthly, there is a filial fear which is never cast out of the mind. This is to be cultivated. This is "the fear of the Lord" which is "the beginning of wisdom." This is a precious gift of grace: "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord." This makes the saints fearful of offending, lest they should grieve infinite love; it causes them to walk before the

Lord with the fear of a loving child who would not in anything displease his parent.

When the spirit of bondage is at work upon the heart, there is much of the fourth form of fear, namely, servile fear; and I tell you that it is the Spirit of truth which brings this to us, because we are in a condition which demands it: we are slaves until Christ sets us free, and, being still under the law, servile fear is our most natural and proper feeling. Would you have the bondsman rejoice in a liberty which he does not possess? Is he not the more likely to be free if he loathes his slavery? I wish that every man here, who is not a child of God, would become possessed with servile fear, and tremble before the Most High.

Now, mark that *while this fear lasts it is intended to work us toward God.* I have already touched upon that. This bondage, which causes fear, breaks us off from self-righteousness; it makes us value the righteousness of Christ, and it also puts an end to certain sins. Many a man, because he is afraid of the consequences, leaves off this and that which would have ruined him; and, so far, the fear is useful to him; and, in after life, the sense of the terror which fear wrought in his soul, will keep him nearer to his Lord. How can he return to that evil thing which aforetime filled his soul with bitterness and grief?

But now I want to notice that *in due time we outgrow this bondage, and never receive it again,* for "We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." There comes a time when the Spirit of truth no longer causes bondage. Why not? Because we are not slaves any longer, and therefore there is no bondage for us. Because we are no longer guilty, having been cleared in the court of God, and therefore no sin should press upon our spirit. Because we are made to be the children of God; and God forbid that God's children should tremble like slaves. No, we have not received the spirit of bondage again, for the Spirit of God has not brought it to us again; and though the devil tries to bring it we do not "receive" his goods; and though sometimes the world thinks that we ought to feel it, we are not of the world, and we will not "receive" the world's spirit. We are new creatures in Christ Jesus; we are not under the law, but under grace; and therefore we are free from our former bondage. "We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." I know some Christians, or persons who call themselves so, who often come under this spirit of bondage. They erroneously say, "If I have sinned I have ceased to be a child of God." That is the spirit of bondage with a vengeance. If a servant disobeys he will be sent adrift; but you cannot discharge your child. My son is my son for ever; who denies that? Sonship is a settled fact, and never can be altered under any possible circumstances. If I am a child of God, who shall separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, my Lord? Some perform all religious actions from a principle of fear; and they abstain from this and that iniquity because of fear. A child of God does not desire to be thus driven or held back. He works not for reward; he toils not in order to gain salvation. He is saved; and because God has "worked in him to will and to do of his own good pleasure," therefore he works out the salvation which God has already worked in. Blessed is the man who knows that he is no longer a servant, but has become an heir of God, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ.

II. This brings us to our second head, which is, THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION. I should require a week to preach properly upon that blessed theme. Instead of preaching upon it, I will give you hints.

Will you kindly notice that the apostle said, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage"? If he had kept strictly to language he would have added, "But ye have received the Spirit of"—— what? Why of "*liberty*." That is the opposite of bondage. Ay, but our apostle is not to be hampered by the rigid rules of composition. He has inserted a far greater word:—"Ye have received the Spirit of *adoption*." This leads me to observe that, from this mode of putting it, it is clear that the Spirit of adoption is in the highest sense the spirit of liberty. If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed. If ye yourselves become sons through that blessed Son, oh, the freeness of your spirits! Your soul has nothing now to fear; you need not dread the wrath of God, for he has sworn, "I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." The believer feels the love of God shed abroad within him, and therefore he exercises a liberty to draw nigh to God, such as he never had before. He has access with boldness: he learns to speak with God as a child speaks to a father. See what a blessed thing is this Spirit of liberty, this Spirit of *adoption*.

Now, the apostle said, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." What is the opposite of that? He should have added—should he not?—"but ye have received the Spirit of liberty by which ye have *confidence*." He has not in so many words expressed himself thus, but he has said all that and a great deal more by saying, "Whereby we cry, Abba, Father." This is the highest form of confidence that can be thought of,—that a child of God should be able, even when he is forced to cry, to cry nothing less than, "Abba, Father." At his lowest, when he is full of sorrow and grief, even in his cryings and lamentings, he sticks to "Abba, Father." This is a joyous confidence indeed! Oh, that God may give it to you, dearly beloved, to the very full!

Thus it is clear that the Spirit of adoption is a spirit of liberty, and a spirit of confidence. As a child is sure that its father will love him, feed him, clothe him, teach him, and do all that is good for him, so are we sure that "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;" but he will make all things to "work together for good to them that love God."

The spirit of bondage made us fear, but the Spirit of adoption gives us *full assurance*. That fear which distrusts God—that fear which doubts whether he will remain a loving and merciful God—that fear which makes us think that all his love will come to an end—that is gone, for we cry, "Abba, Father," and that cry is the death of doubting and fearing. We sing to brave music, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him."

The Spirit of adoption, moreover, is a spirit of *gratitude*. Oh, that ever the Lord should put *me* among the children! Why should he do this? He did not want for children that he should adopt *me*. The First-born alone was enough to fill the Father's heart throughout eternity. And yet the Lord puts *us* among the children. Blessed be his

name for ever and ever! "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!"

The Spirit of adoption is a spirit of *child-likeness*. It is pretty, though sometimes sad, to see how children imitate their parents. How much the little man is like his father! Have you not noticed it? Do you not like to see it, too? You know you do. Ay, and when God gives the Spirit of adoption, there begins in us, poor fallen creatures as we are, some little likeness to himself; and that will grow to his perfect image. We cannot become God; but we have the privilege and the power to become the sons of God. "Even to as many as believe on his name" does Jesus give this privilege; and therefore we grow up into him in all things, who is our Head, and at the same time the pattern and mirror of what all the children of God are to be.

Thus, dear friends, let us see with great joy that we have not received again the spirit of bondage. We shall not receive it any more. The Spirit of God will never come to us in that form again, for now we have been washed in the blood, we have been taken away from being heirs of wrath even as others, we have been placed in the family of the Most High, and we feel the Spirit of adoption within us, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father."

III. Just two or three words only upon the next spirit, which is, THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER. Whenever the Spirit of adoption enters into a man it sets him praying. He cannot help it. He does not wish to help it.

> "Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
> The Christian's native air;
> His watchword at the gates of death:
> He enters heaven with prayer."

And this praying of the true believer who has the Spirit of adoption is very *earnest* praying, for it takes the form of crying. He does not *say*, "Abba, Father." Anybody can say those words. But he *cries*, "Abba, Father." Nobody can *cry*, "Abba, Father," but by the Holy Ghost. When those two words, "Abba, Father," are set to the music of a child's cry, there is more power in them than in all the orations of Demosthenes and Cicero. They are such heavenly sounds as only the twice-born, the true aristocracy of God, can ever utter, "Abba, Father:" they even move the heart of the Eternal.

But it is also very *natural* praying: for a child to say, "Father," is according to the fitness of things. It is not necessary to send your boys to a Board School to teach them to do that. They cry "Father," soon and often. So, when we are born again, "Our Father, which art in heaven," is a prayer that is never forced upon us: it rises up naturally within the new-born nature; and because we are born again we cry, "Abba, Father." When we have lost our Father for awhile, we cry after him in the dark. When he takes the rod to us we cry; but we cry no otherwise than this—"Abba, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

It seems to me to be not only an earnest cry and a natural cry, but a very *appealing* cry. It touches your heart when your child says, "Don't hurt me, father. Dear father, by your love to me, forgive me." True prayer pleads the fatherhood of God—"My father, my father, I am no

stranger; I am no foe, I am thy own dear and well-beloved child. Therefore, like as a father pitieth his children, have thou pity upon me." The Lord never turns a deaf ear to such pleadings. He says, "I do earnestly remember him still," and in love he checks his hand.

And what a *familiar* word it is—"Abba, Father"! They say that slaves were never allowed to call their masters "abba." That was a word for free-born children only: no man can speak with God as God's children may. I have heard critics say sometimes of our prayers, "How familiar that man is with God"; and one adds, "I do not like such boldness." No, you slaves; of course, you cannot speak with God as a child can; and it would not be right that you should! It befits you to fear, and crouch, and, like miserable sinners, to keep yourselves a long way off from God. Distance is the slave's place; only the child may draw near. But if you are children, then you may say, "Lord, thou hast had mercy upon me, miserable sinner as I was; and thou hast cleansed me, and I am thine; therefore deal with me according to the riches of thy grace. My soul delighteth herself in thee, for thou art my God, and my exceeding joy." Who but a true-born child of God can understand that word—"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he will give thee the desires of thine heart."

I do not know any more *delightful* expression towards God than to say to him, "Abba, Father." It is as much as to say—"My heart knows that thou art my Father. I am as sure of it as that I am the child of my earthly father; and I am more sure that thou wouldest deal tenderly with me than that my father would." Paul hints at this when he reminds us that our fathers, verily, chastened us after their own pleasure, but the Lord always chastens us for our profit. The heavenly Father's heart is never angry so as to smite in wrath; but in pity, and gentleness, and tenderness, he afflicts his sons and daughters. "Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." See what a blessed state this is to be brought into, to be made children of God, and then in our prayers to be praying, not like serfs and servants, but as children who cry, "Abba, Father."

IV. Now, the last thing is, THE SPIRIT OF WITNESS:—"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

There are two witnesses to the adoption of every child of God. Two is a legal number: in the mouth of two witnesses the whole shall be established. The first witness is *the man's own spirit.* His spirit says, "Yes, yes, yes, I am a child of God. I feel those drawings towards God; I feel that delight in him; I feel that love to him; I feel that wish to obey him, which I never could have felt if I were not his child. Moreover, God's own word declares, 'To as many as received him'—that is Christ—'to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;' now, I have received Christ, and I do believe on his name: therefore, I have the evidence of God's written word that I am one of the sons of God. I have the right, the permission, the authority, to be one of the sons of God. That is the witness of my spirit: I believe, and therefore I am a child."

Now comes in *the witness of the Holy Spirit.* Nobody can question his veracity; but how does the Spirit of God witness to our sonship?

First, he witnesses it, as I have already said, *through the word* of

which he is the Author. The word contained in Scripture is quite enough for us if we have a saving faith. We accept it and believe it. The Spirit of God thus witnesses through the Word, and that is the surest medium. "We have a more sure word of testimony," said Peter. That is a wonderful declaration of the apostle. Peter had spoken about seeing Christ transfigured on the holy mount. Was not that sure? Yes, it was, but he, in effect, says,—We have a more sure word of testimony than all the sights that we have seen, whereunto we do well if we take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.

Next, the Spirit of God *bears witness by his work in us.* He works in us that which proves us to be the children of God; and what is that?

The first thing is that he works in us great love to God. None love God but those that are born of him. There is no true love to God in Christ Jesus except in those that have been begotten again by God's own Spirit, so that our love to God is the witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God.

Furthermore, he works in us a veneration for God. We fear before him with a childlike reverence: everything that has to do with God becomes sacred to us when he communes with us. Ay, if he only met us in a dream we should say, "How dreadful is this place! It is none other than the house of God, and it is the very gate of heaven." The place of his feet is glorious in our eyes. The meanest of his chosen are honourable in our esteem. This holy awe of believers is a proof of their being God's children. If he be their Father they will reverence him, for we know that when we had fathers of our flesh, they corrected us, and we gave them reverence, for it was due to them. Shall we not be in subjection to the Father of our spirits? That subjection is the surest evidence that we are indeed the sons of God.

In addition to this, the Spirit of God works in us a holy confidence. By his grace we feel in days of trouble that we can rest in God. When we cannot see our way we go on joyfully without seeing. What is the good of seeing with our own eyes when the eyes of the Lord are running to and fro in the earth to show himself strong in the behalf of all them that trust in him? Our faith feels a joy in believing seeming contradictions, a delight in accepting apparent impossibilities. We have a belief in God's veracity so sure and steadfast that if all the angels in heaven were to deny the truth of God we would laugh them to scorn. *He must be true,* and we know it: every word of his book is as certainly true to us as if we had seen the thing with our own eyes—ay, and truer still, for eyes deceive, and mislead, but God never can. Wherever there is this blessed child-like trust, there is the Spirit's witness that we are the children of God.

And then, again, when the Spirit of God works in us sanctification, that becomes a further witness of our sonship. When he makes us hate sin, when he makes us love everything that is pure and good, when he helps us to conquer ourselves, when he leads us to love our fellow-men, when he fashions us like to Christ, this is the witness of the Spirit with our spirit that we are the children of God. Oh, to have more and more of it!

Besides which, I believe that there is a voice unheard of the outward ear, which drops in silence on the spirit of man, and lets him know that

he has, indeed, passed from death unto life. This also is the seal of the Spirit to the truth of our adoption.

Now let us begin at the beginning, and bless him that ever he made us feel the bondage of sin. Let us bless him that he made us fear and tremble, and fly to Jesus. Let us bless him that he has brought us into the adoption of children. Let us bless him that he helps us to cry "Abba, Father"; and, lastly, let us bless him that to-night he bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

Dear friend, dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? If so, all the privileges of an heir of God are thine. If thou dost not believe in Christ, the Spirit of God will never bear witness to a lie, and tell thee that thou art saved when thou art not. If thou art not saved and not yet a believer in Jesus, I tell thee that thou art like a blank document to which the Spirit of God will never set his hand and seal, for he is never so unwise as to sign a blank. If thou hast believed, thou art a child of God, and the Spirit of God sets his seal to thy adoption. Go in peace, and rejoice in the Lord for ever.

Nor fret, nor doubt, nor suffer slavish fear:
Thy spirit is released, thy path is clear.
Let praise fill up thy day, and evermore
Live thou to love, to copy, and adore.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans viii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—728, 647, 660.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

TO MY BELOVED READERS,—In putting together these three sermons, wherewith to commence the thirtieth yearly volume, I have felt deep gratitude to God for all his past goodness in connection with these discourses. Still, my more prominent thought has been a longing for more grace for years to come, and for this I entreat your loving prayers in increased power. Many are the kindnesses which I have received at your hands; add to them this much more: pray for the preacher, spread the sermons among your friends, and bless the Lord whenever you derive the least benefit from them. By these three helps these sermons will be continued not only in publication but in usefulness. The times are dark: every star is precious.

Wishing you A HAPPY NEW YEAR,

I am, yours heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Menton, Dec. 29.

P.S.—Please read what I have to say in *The Sword and the Trowel*.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"HE SHALL BE GREAT."

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, DECEMBER 2ND, 1883, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

Being his last Sermon before his Journey to the South of France.

"He shall be great."—Luke i. 32.

STRICTLY speaking, I suppose these words refer to the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is as to his humanity that Christ was born of Mary. The context runs thus—"Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." The angel of the Lord thus spake concerning the manhood of "that holy thing" that should be born of the favoured virgin by the overshadowing of the power of the Highest. As to his divinity, we must speak concerning him in another style than this: but, as a man, he was born of the virgin, and it was said to her before his birth, "He shall be great."

The man Christ Jesus stooped very low. In his first estate he was not great; he was very little when he hung upon his mother's breast. In his after estate he was not great; but despised, rejected, and crucified. Indeed, he was so poor that he had not where to lay his head; and he was so cast out by the tongues of men that they called him a "fellow," mentioned him among drunken men and wine-bibbers, and even accused him of having a devil, and being mad. In the esteem of the great ones of the earth he was an ignorant Galilean of whom they said, "We know not whence he is." His life binds up more fitly with the lowly annals of the poor than with the court-circular or whatever stood for that in Cæsar's day. In his own time his enemies could not find a word base enough to express their contempt of him. He was brought very low in his trial, condemnation, and suffering. Who thought him great when he was covered with bloody sweat, or when he was sold at the price of a slave, or when a guard came out against him with swords, and with lanterns, and with torches, as if he had been a thief? Who thought him great when they bound him and led him to the judgment-seat as a malefactor?

or when the abjects smote him, blindfolded him, and spat in his face? or when he was scourged, led through the streets bearing his cross, and afterwards hung up between two thieves to die? Truly he was brought very low, and a sword pierced through his mother's heart as she saw the sufferings of her holy Son. When she knew that he was dead, and buried in a borrowed tomb, she must have painfully pondered in her heart the words from heaven concerning him, and thought within herself, "The angel said he should be great, but who is made so vile as he? He said that he should be called the 'Son of the Highest,' but, lo! he is brought into the dust of death; and men seal his sepulchre, and cast out his name as evil."

Still, while I think that our text most fitly applies to the manhood of Christ in the first place, I rejoice to think that—

> "He who on earth as man was known,
> And bore our sins and pains,
> Now, seated on th' eternal throne,
> The God of glory reigns."

The very man who was despised and spat upon sits glorious on his Father's throne. As man he is anointed "King of kings, and Lord of lords." As man he has been lifted up from the lowest depths, and set in the greatest heights to reign for ever and ever. Peter and the apostles testified, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses, he being by the right hand of God exalted." Stephen also said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." While we believe that, and rejoice in it, we shall be wise never to dissociate the deity of Christ from his humanity, for they make up one person. I cannot help remarking that in the New Testament you find a disregard of all rigid distinction of the two natures in the person of our Lord when the Spirit speaks concerning him. The two natures are so thoroughly united in the person of Christ that the Holy Ghost does not speak of the Lord Jesus with theological exactness, like one who writes a creed, but he speaks as to men of understanding, who know and rejoice in the truth of the one indivisible person of the Mediator. For instance, we read in Scripture of "the blood of God": Paul saith in Acts xx. 28, "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Now, strictly speaking, there can be no blood of God, and the expression looks like a confusion of the two natures; but this is intentional, that we may clearly see that the two natures are so joined together that the Holy Ghost does not stop to dissect and set out differences; but he says of the united person of our blessed Lord that which is strictly true either of his humanity or of his deity. He is called both "God, our Saviour," and "the man Christ Jesus." The combined natures of the man, the God, Christ Jesus our Lord, are one person; and all the acts of either nature may be ascribed to that one person. Hence I, for one, do not hesitate to sing such verses as these—

> "He that distributes crowns and thrones,
> Hangs on a tree, and bleeds and groans:
> The Prince of Life resigns his breath;
> The King of Glory bows to death."

"Well might the sun in darkness hide,
And shut his glories in,
When God, the mighty Maker, died
For man, the creature's sin."

"See how the patient Jesus stands,
Insulted in his lowest case!
Sinners have bound the Almighty hands,
And spit in their Creator's face."

We shall not labour, therefore, to preserve the niceties of theology, but we shall at this time freely speak of our Lord as he is in his Godhead and in his manhood, and apply our text to the whole Christ, declaring the divine promise that "He shall be great."

While my brother was praying for me I was wishing that I had the tongues of men and of angels with which to set forth my theme to-night; and yet I shall retract my wish, for the subject is such, that if my words were the commonest that could be found—yea, if they were ungrammatical, and if they were put together most uncouthly, it would little matter; for a failure awaits me in any case: the subject far transcends all utterance. Jesus is such a one that no oratory can ever reach the height of his glory, and the simplest words are best suited to a subject so sublime. Fine words would be but tawdry things to hang beside the unspeakably glorious Lord. I can say no more than that *he is great.* If I could tell forth his greatness with choral symphonies of cherubim, yet should I fail to reach the height of this great argument. I will be content if I can touch the hem of the garment of his greatness. If the Lord will but set us in a cleft of the rock, and only make us see the back parts of his character, we shall be overcome by the vision. As yet, even of Jesus, the face of his full glory cannot be seen, or if seen, it cannot be described. Were we caught up to the third heaven we should have little to say on coming back, for we should have seen things which it were not lawful for us to utter. I shall not therefore fail with loss of honour if I tell you that my utmost success at this time will but touch the fringe of the splendour of the Son of man. This is not the time of his clearest revealing. The day is coming for the manifestation of the Lord; as yet he shineth not forth among men in his noontide. His second advent shall more fully reveal him. Then shall his people "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," because he also shall rise in the clear face of heaven as the Sun of Righteousness, greatly blessing the sons of men.

I. Let me touch my theme as best I can by, first of all, saying of our adorable Lord Jesus that HE IS GREAT FROM MANY POINTS OF VIEW. I might have said from *every* point of view; but that is too large a truth to be surveyed at one sitting. Mind would fail us, life would fail us, time would fail us: eternity and perfection will alone suffice for that boundless meditation. But from the points of view to which I would conduct you for a moment, the Lord Jesus Christ is emphatically great.

First, *in the perfection of his nature.* Think, my brethren. There was never such a being as our Well-Beloved. He is peerless and incomparable. He is divine, and therefore unique. He is "Light of light, very God of very God." Jesus is truly equal with God, one with

the Father. Oh, the greatness of Godhead! Jehovah is a being infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, inconceivable! He filleth all things, and yet is not contained by all things. He is indeed great beyond any idea of greatness that has ever dawned upon us. All this is true of the Only-Begotten. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." "He is before all things, and by him all things consist."

But our Lord Jesus is also man, and this makes the singularity of his person, that he should be perfectly and purely God, and as truly and really man. He is not humanity deified: he is not Godhead humanized. I have admitted latitude of expression; but there is, in fact, no confusion of the substance. He is God. He is man. He is all that God is, and all that man is as God created him. He is as truly God as if he were not man, and yet as completely and perfectly man as if he were not God. Think of this wondrous combination! a perfect manhood without spot or stain of original or actual sin, and then the glorious Godhead combined with it! Said I not truly that Jesus stands alone? He is not greatest of the great; but great where all else are little. He is not something among all; but all where all else are nothing. Who shall be compared with him? He counts it not robbery to be equal with God, and among men he is the Firstborn of every creature; among the risen ones he is the Firstborn by his resurrection from the dead; among the glorified he is the source and object of glory. I cannot compass his nature: who shall declare his generation? He is one with us, and yet inconceivably beyond us. Our nature is limited, sinful, fallen; but his nature is unbounded, holy, divine. When Jehovah looks on us we ask, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" But "when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Shall it not truly be said as to his nature, "He is great"?

He is great also *in the grandeur of his offices*. Remember that he has for our sakes undertaken to be our Redeemer. You see your bondage, brethren. You know it, for some of you have worn the fetters till they have entered into your soul: from such slavery he came to redeem us. Behold his Zion in ruins, heaps on heaps, smoking, consumed! He comes to rebuild and to restore. This is his office—to build up the old wastes, and to restore the temple of the living God, which had been cast down by the foe. To accomplish this he came to be our Priest, our Prophet, and our King; in each office glorious beyond compare. He came to be our Saviour, our Sacrifice, our Substitute, our Surety, our Head, our Friend, our Lord, our Life, our All. Pile up the offices, and remember that each one is worthy of a God. Mention them as you may, and truly you shall never remember them all; for he, the express image of his Father's glory, has undertaken every kind of office, that he might perfectly redeem his people, and make them to be his own for ever. In each office he has gained the summit of glory, and therein he is and shall be great.

Have you ever stood in Westminster Abbey when some great warrior

was being buried, and when the herald pronounced his various titles? He has been greatly honoured of his queen, and of the nation, for which he has fought so valiantly, and he is prince of this, and duke of that, and count of the other, and earl of something else: and the titles are many and brilliant. What a parade it is! "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" What boots it to the senseless clay that it is buried with pomp of heraldry? But I stand at the tomb of Christ, and I say of his offices that they are superlatively grand; and, moreover, that they are not buried, neither is he among the dead. He lives and bears his honours still in the fulness of their splendour. He is all to his people still; every office he still carries on, and will carry on till he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and God shall be all in all. Oh, the splendour of this Christ of God in the mighty offices which he sustains! He is the Standard-bearer among ten thousand. Who is like unto him in all eternity? "The government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Let our hearts give him our adoring praise to-night, for he is great in the glorious offices which God has heaped upon him.

His nature and his offices would alone furnish us with a lengthened theme; but oh! my brethren, the Lord Jesus is great *in the splendour of his achievements.* He does not wear an office whose duty is neglected; but his name is faithful and true. He is no holder of a sinecure; he claims to have finished the work which his Father gave him to do. He has undertaken great things, and, glory be to his name, he has achieved them. His people's sins were laid upon him, and he bore them up to the cross, and on the cross he made an end of them, so that they will never be mentioned against them any more for ever. Then he went down into the grave, and slept there for a little season; but he tore away the bars of the sepulchre and left death dead at his feet, bringing life and immortality to light by his resurrection. This was his high calling, and he has fulfilled it. His victory is complete, the defeat of the foe is perfect. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Springing upward from the tomb when the appointed days were come, he opened heaven's gates to all believers, according to the word,—"The breaker is come up before them, and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them." As he opened the golden gates, he led captivity captive; and, receiving gifts for men, he cast down a royal largess among the poorest of his people that they might be enriched thereby. This was his object, and the design has been carried out without flaw or failure. Within the veil he went, our Representative, to take possession of our crowns and thrones, which he holds for us to this day by the tenure of his own cross. Having purchased the inheritance, and paid off the heavy mortgage that lay upon it, he has taken possession of the Canaan wherein our souls shall dwell at the end of the days when we shall stand in our lot. Is it not proven that he is great? Conquerors are great, and he is the greatest of them. Deliverers are great, and he is the greatest of them. Liberators are great, and he is the greatest of them. Saviours are great, and he is the greatest of them. They that multiply the joys of men are truly great, and what shall I say of him

who has bestowed everlasting joy upon his people, and entailed it upon them by a covenant of salt for ever and ever? Well didst thou say, O Gabriel, "He shall be great," for great indeed he is!

He shall be great, again, *in the prevalence of his merits.* Never being had such merit as Christ. His life and death cover all believers from head to foot with a perfect obedience to the law. With royal vesture are they clad: Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. His blood has washed believers white as the driven snow, and his righteousness has made them to be "accepted in the Beloved." He has such merit with God that he deserves of the Most High whatsoever he wills to ask; and he asks for his people that they shall have every blessing needful for eternal life and perfection. He is great, indeed, my brethren, when we think that he has clothed us all in his righteousness, and washed us all in his blood. Nor us alone, but ten thousand times ten thousand of his redeemed stand to-day in the wedding-dress of his eternal merit, and plead before God a claim that never can be denied —the claim of a perfect obedience which must always please the Father's heart. Oh, what mercy is that which has turned our hell to heaven, transformed our disease into health, and lifted us from the dunghill, and set us among the princes of his people! In infinite power to remove sin, to perfume with acceptance, to clothe with righteousness, to win blessings, to preserve saints, and to save to the uttermost, the Lord Jesus is great beyond all greatness.

My theme will never be exhausted, though I may be. Let me not delay to add that our Lord Jesus Christ is great *in the number of his saved ones.* I do not believe in a little Christ, or a little heaven, or a little company before the throne, or a few that shall be saved. Hear you this, for I would fain reply to a lie that is often stated, and is the last resort of those who assail the doctrines of grace. They say that we believe that God has left the great mass of his creatures to perish, and has arbitrarily chosen an elect few. We have never thought such a thing. We believe that the Lord has an elect many; and it is our joy and delight to think of them as a number that no man can number. "Oh," they say, "you think that the few who go to your little Bethel or Salem are the elect of God." That, sirs, is what you invent for your own purposes, but *we* have never said anything of the sort. We rejoice to believe that as many as the stars of heaven shall the redeemed of Christ be—that as many as the sands that are upon the sea-shore, even an innumerable company, are those for whom Christ has shed his precious blood that he might effectually redeem them. As I look up to the heaven of the sanctified, my mind's eye does not see a few dozen saints met together in select circles of exclusiveness; but my eyes are dazzled with the countless lights which shine each one from the lustrous brows of the redeemed; lustrous I say, for each glorified one wears upon his forehead the name of the Most High. My heart is glad to turn away from the multitude that throng the broad way, and to see a greater multitude that throng the heavenly fields, and, day without night, celebrate redemption by the blood of the Lamb. Have they not washed their robes, and made them white in his blood? In all things our Lord will have the pre-eminence, and this shall be the case in the number of his followers: he shall therein vanquish his great enemy. His re-

deemed shall fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows. Countless as the drops of morning dew shall his people be in the day of his power. He shall be great in the host of his adherents in glory.

Multitudes upon earth are even now pursuing their road to heaven, and greater hosts are yet to follow them. A day shall be when the people of God shall be increased exceedingly, above anything that we see at this present; they shall spring up as the grass and as willows by the water-courses, as if every stone that heard the ripple of the brook had been turned into a man. The seed of the Lord Jesus Christ shall multiply till arithmetic shall be utterly baffled, and numeration shall fail. He is great—a great Saviour of a great mass of great sinners, who shall by his redeeming arm be brought safely, without fail, to his right hand in the endless glory. As the tribes of the natural Israel increased exceedingly, so also shall the spiritual Israel. The Lord shall multiply his Zion with men as with a flock, and thus shall the King of Israel be great.

Brethren and sisters, the Lord Jesus Christ shall be great *in the estimation of his people.* If I were to try to-night to praise my Lord to the highest heavens, my brother might well follow me, and extol our Lord much more. Then I would get up from my seat again, and I would not rest until I found yet loftier praises for my Lord and God. Then might my dear brother return to the happy task, and excel me yet again; and then, for sure, I would be on my feet a third time, and keep up the hallowed rivalry, lauding and magnifying Jesus to my mind's utmost; and, if the Lord permitted, we would never leave off, for I would give in to no man in my desire to extol my Lord Jesus. I am sure that none of his people would give way to others in a humble sense of supreme indebtedness; but each one would say, "There is something which he has done for me which he never did for you. There is some point of view in which he is greater to me than he is to you." Brothers, I admit that there are many points in which he is greater to you than he is to me; but yet to me he is higher than heaven, vaster than eternity, more delightful than Paradise, more blessed than blessedness itself. If I could speak of him according to my soul's desire, I would speak in great capital letters, and not in the small italics which I am compelled to use. If I could speak as I would, I would make winds and waves my orators, and cause the whole universe to become one open mouth with which to tell out the praises of Emmanuel. If all eternity would speak, as though it, too, were but one tongue, yet it could not tell out all the charms of his love and the sureness of his faithfulness and his truth. We must leave off somewhere, but, truly, if it be the point of our estimation of him we never can express our overwhelming sense of his honour, his excellence, his sweetness. Oh, that he were praised by every creature that has breath! Oh, that every minute placed another gem in his crown! Oh, that every soul that breathes did continue to breathe out nothing but hosannas and hallelujahs unto him, for he deserves all possible praises! Do you hear the crash of the multitudinous music of heaven? It is like many waters, and like the mighty waves of the sea; but it is all for him. Can you catch the charming notes of "harpers harping with their harps"? Their harpings are all for him. Can you conceive the unutterable joys of the glorified? Every felicity

of eternity is a song to his honour. Heaven and earth shall yet be full of the out-shinings of his glory. Who can look the sun in the face in the height of his noontide? Who can tell the illimitable greatnesses of the Son of God? To him, even to him, let all praises be, for he has redeemed our souls with blood, and set the captives free: he has made us unto our God both kings and priests, and we shall reign with him for ever and for ever. Truly, he is great, and shall be great eternally.

But, oh, brethren, how great must Christ be *in the glory of heaven!* We have never seen that. Some of us shall see it full soon.

> "For we are in the border-land,
> The heavenly country's near at hand:
> A step is all 'twixt us and rest,
> E'en now we converse with the blest."

But the greatness of Christ in heaven—surely this is the grand sight for which we long to go to heaven,—that we may behold his glory, "the glory which he had with the Father before the world was," and the glory which he has gained by his service of the Father here below. Has he not said, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory"? What honour and majesty surround our Prince in the metropolis of his empire! What is this city? Whence comes its brightness? The sun is dim, the moon no more displays herself. "The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof": the whole city shines in the Redeemer's glory. And who are these that come trooping down the golden streets?—these shining ones, each one comparable to a living, moving sun? each one as bright as the star of the morning? Ask them whence comes their brightness, and they tell you that the glory of Christ has risen upon them, and they are reflecting his brightness as the moon reflects the effulgence of the sun. If you sit down with one of these shining ones, and hear him tell his story, the sum of the matter will be, "Not unto us; but unto him that loved us, be honour and glory." This will be the substance of every testimony,—"He loved me, and gave himself for me;" only they will put it something like this—"HE loved *me*. He, that great HE." How they will pronounce it as they point to his glory—"HE loved me—that little *me*." They will sink their voices, oh, so low, as with wonder and surprise they express their admiration that ever he could have loved such unworthy ones as they were.

But I must not—dare not—try to touch upon the *glory of Christ upon the throne of the Father*. Certain great divines have written upon the glory of Christ, but I will warrant you that, when they died and went to heaven, they half wished that they could come back again to amend their most glowing pages. Ah me, what can ignorance say of the All-wise? What do blinking owls know of high noon? What do we poor limited creatures, babes of yesterday, know of the Infinite, the Ancient of days, and of the splendour that flames from the Firstborn at the right hand of the Most High? It would need an angel to tell us that; but, peradventure, if he did, either we should not understand, or else what we did understand would overpower us, and we should fall before our Lord as dead. The heavens are now telling the glory of our Lord, but the half of it will never be told throughout ages of ages. Assuredly, concerning our adorable Lord Jesus it is true—"He shall be great."

II. Now, by your leave, I want to turn the subject a little round, and look at it in another light. "He shall be great," and he is so, for HE DEALS WITH GREAT THINGS.

He is a Saviour, and a great one. As I have already said, it was a *great ruin* which he came to restore. The wind came from the abyss and smote the four corners of the house of manhood, and it fell and lay along. Devils laughed and triumphed as they saw God's handiwork despoiled. Human nature sank in shame, Paradise was blasted, sin was triumphant, and the fiery sword was set at Eden's gate to exclude us. It was a hideous ruin. But, oh! when Christ came, he brought a great salvation. He came to prepare a better Paradise, and to plant in it a better tree of life, and to give us possession of it upon a better tenure than before. Oh, he is a great Saviour; he wrought amid the chaos of the fall, and restored what Adam had destroyed!

And, beloved, we were covered with *great sin*—some of us especially so. But "he shall be great," and therefore he makes short work of great sin. Great sinners, what a joy it ought to be to you to think that he is great, and, therefore, has come to rescue such as you are, and deal with such difficulties as beset and surround *you;* for what if sin be great? His arrangement for its removal is great too. Look there at Calvary, and, if you can see it through your blinding tears, behold the sacrifice he offered once for all to put away sin. Regard the old Tabernacle and its faulty types:—Aaron has offered his bullock which has smoked to heaven, but no result has followed. Aaron has brought his lambs, and goats, and rams, and their blood in basins is thrown at the altar foot: the whole soil of the Tabernacle is saturated with the blood of bullocks and of goats: but no result has come of it. These can never take away sin. See now the greater sacrifice which Jesus brings. That great High Priest of ours is great indeed, for he has offered up *himself* without spot unto God! Lo, on his great altar there smokes to heaven no longer clouding incense or burning flesh, but the body and soul of the appointed Substitute are offered up in sacrifice for men. We have none of us a due conception of the grandeur of that vicarious offering, which at once and for ever made an end of sin. Think of it carefully and in detail. Count it no light thing that he who was the Father's equal, that he who was pure and perfect in both natures, became a curse for us, and was made sin for us, and presented himself as a victim to justice on our behalf. This is a wonder among wonders, as much exceeding miracle as miracle exceeds the most common-place fact. It overtops the highest Alps of thought, that he who was offended should expiate the offence, he who was perfect should suffer punishment, he who was all goodness should be made sin, and he who was all love should be forsaken of the God of love. What merit and majesty are found in his glorious oblation! Great is the sin, but greater is the sacrifice. The atonement has covered the guilt, and left a margin of abounding righteousness.

Beloved, what a mercy it is for us that we have such a High-Priest, for if you and I are burdened to-night with great transgression, there is *great pardon* to be had—pardon so great that it actually annihilates the sin—pardon so great that the sin is cast behind Jehovah's back, while the pardon rings out perpetual notes of joy and peace in the soul.

"His the pardon, ours the sin,—
Great the sin, the pardon great;
Great his good which healed our ill,
Great his love which killed our hate."

He shall be great indeed who has wrought us so great salvation.

And now, dear friends, you and I, being greatly pardoned through the great sacrifice, are journeying through the wilderness toward Canaan, and we have *great wants* and many, pressing upon us every day. We are poverty itself, and only All-sufficiency can supply us; but that is found in Jesus. We need great abundance of food: the heavenly bread lies around about the camp, and each may fill his omer. We require rivers of living water: the smitten rock yields us a ceaseless flood; the out-flow never ceases. We have great demands, but Christ has *great supplies*. Between here and heaven we shall have, perhaps, greater wants than we have yet known; but, all along, every halting-place is ready, provender is laid up, good cheer is stored, nothing has been overlooked. The commissariat of the Eternal is absolutely perfect. Do you feel sometimes so thirsty for grace that like Behemoth you could drink up Jordan at a draught? more than that river could hold is given you. Drink abundantly, for Christ has prepared you a bottomless sea of grace to fill you with all the fulness of God. Stint not yourselves, and doubt not your Saviour: wherefore should you limit the Holy One of Israel? Be great in your experience of his all-sufficiency, and great in your praises of his bounty, and then in heaven you shall pour at his feet great treasures of gratitude for ever and ever.

Yes, and he is a Christ *of great preparations*. He is engaged before the throne to-day in preparing a *great heaven* for his people; it will be made up of great deliverance, great peace, great rest, great joy, great victory, great discovery, great fellowship, great rapture, great glory. He is preparing for his redeemed no little heaven, no starveling banquet, no narrow delight. He is a great Creator, and he is creating a great Paradise wherein a great multitude shall be greatly happy for ever and ever. "He shall be great"—great in the bliss of his innumerable elect. If we once get within the pearly gates, and walk those golden streets, we are not ashamed to-night to vow that he shall be great; we will make him glorious before his holy angels. If praises can make him great, our praises shall ring out day and night at the very loudest, and ten thousand times ten thousand of the glorified shall join with us in perpetual hallelujahs to him who loved us before all worlds, and will love us when all worlds shall cease to be. "He shall be great." He must be great. If we live it shall be our business to sing like the Virgin, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

III. I have come to a close when I have said a few words upon the last point, which is this: HIS GREATNESS WILL SOON APPEAR. It now lies under a cloud to men's blear eyes. They still belittle him with their vague and vain thoughts; but it shall not always be so. It is midnight with his honour here just now; or if it be not midnight, it is much the same, for men are stone blind. But it will not be darkness long, nor shall human minds be blinded for ever. My eyes foresee the dawning. Did you hear the clarion just now? I dream not that ears of flesh can catch the sound as yet; but the ears of faith can hear it. The

trumpet rings out exceeding loud and long, and after the trumpet there is heard this voice: "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh! Go ye forth to meet him." Hear ye not the shouts of armies,—"Lo, he cometh! Lo, he cometh! Lo, he cometh!" Right gladly I hear the cry. Let the world ring with the joy-note. He comes. That trumpet proclaims him. I shall propound no order now as to how predicted events shall happen; but I know this, that the Lord shall reign for ever and ever, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Hallelujah! "He shall be great." The nations shall bow at his feet. Rebellious enemies shall own him as their King. The whole universe shall be filled with the glory of God. There shall be left no space where his light shall not shine. "He shall be great." To him "every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Fret not yourselves, brethren, because of the false doctrine which roams through the world to-day. Worry not your hearts as though the Christ were defeated. He is clad in shining armour, through which no dart of error can ever pierce. He lingers for a little while upon the hills, surveying the battle-field with eagle-eye. He leaves his poor servants to prove how weak they are, as they almost turn their backs in the day of battle. He lets heaven and earth see the weakness of an arm of flesh. But courage, brethren! The Prince Emmanuel hastens! You may hear his horse hoofs on the road. He is near to come. On white horses shall his chosen follow him, going forth "conquering and to conquer," for the battle is the Lord's, and he will deliver the enemy into our hands. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever; King of kings! Hallelujah! "He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet."

The day is coming when the mighty progress of the gospel shall make Christ to be great among men; and then you need not listen long to hear that other trumpet which shall wake the sleeping dead. The Risen One descends. *Resurrection* is at hand! Oh, what greatness will be upon Christ in that hour when all shall leave their graves, even the whole multitude of the slain of death! He shall be glorious among them, the Firstfruits of the resurrection, illustrious in those who rise by virtue of his rising. Oh, what honour will he have that day! Jesus, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise as they see thee victorious over death in all those quickened myriads.

Then shall come the *Judgment;* and oh, how great will Christ be in men's eyes in that day when he sits upon the throne and holds the scales of justice, and judges men for the deeds done in the body! I warrant you that none will deny his Godhead in that day. None will proclaim themselves his adversaries in that dread hour. The earth is reeling! The sky is crumbling! The stars are falling! The sun is quenched! The moon is black as sackcloth of hair! and Jesus is sitting on the throne! A cry is heard from all his enemies, "Hide us, mountains. Rocks fall upon us. Hide us from his face." That face of his—calm, quiet, and triumphant, shall be terrible to them. They will cry in horror, "Hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." But they cannot be hidden. Fly whither they may, those eyes pursue them—those eyes of love more terrible than flames of wrath. Oil, though it be soft, yet burns full furiously; and

love on fire is hell. Fiercer than a lion on his prey is love when once it groweth angry for holiness' sake and truth's sake. In that day those who know his love shall admire him beyond measure; but those who know his wrath shall equally feel that "he is great." Though it be their hell to feel it, yet shall they know that there is none so great as he, when he shall take the iron rod, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Their cries of remorse and despair, as they rise up to the throne of his awful majesty, shall proclaim to an awe-struck universe that Jesus is great. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

He shall be great, finally, *when he shall gather all his elect about him*—when all the souls redeemed by blood shall assemble within his palace-gate to worship him. Oh, what a sight it will be when he is seen as the centre, while, far away from north, south, east, and west, a blazing host of shining ones, all glorious in his glory, shall in ever-widening circles surround his person and his throne, all bowing down before the Son of God, and crying, "Hallelujah!" as they adore him! Not one will doubt him there, nor oppose him there. Oh, what a sight it shall be when every one shall praise him to the uttermost; when from every heart shall leap up reverent love, when every tongue shall sound forth his honours, when there shall be no division, no discord, no jarring notes; but countless armies shall as one man adore the Lord whom they love! Again they say, "Hallelujah!" and the incense of their adoration goeth up for ever and ever. Oh, for that grandest of cries, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and his Son is exalted to sit with him upon the throne of his glory for ever and ever." Truly, he shall be great.

Oh, make him great to-night, poor sinner, by trusting him! Make him great to-night, dear child of God, by longing for him. Make him great as you come to the table by hungering after him. Count it a great privilege to eat and drink with him with overflowing delight. Come with a great hunger and a great thirst after him, and take him into your very self, and say, "He is my bread: he is my drink: he is my life: he is my all." All the while let your spirit live by adoring, and let every pulse of your body beat to his honour. Tune your hand, your heart, your tongue to this one song, "Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah! Unto him that loved us and died for us, and rose again, be glory for ever and ever!"

"To the Lamb that was slain all honour be paid,
Let crowns without number encircle his head:
Let blessing, and glory, and riches, and might,
Be ascribed evermore by angels of light."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke i. 5—80.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—387, 414.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE LORD WITH TWO OR THREE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 4TH, 1883, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."—Matthew xviii. 20.

WE have in the verses preceding the text a mention of the first *church-meeting* of which I remember to have found mention in the New Testament. The Saviour declares of his assembled people, "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." A few believers, gathered out of the world, have met in the name of the Lord Jesus, to attend to the affairs of his household here below. It is a case of discipline. A brother has trespassed against another brother. The offended one has sought him out privately, and by personal expostulation has endeavoured to bring him to a better mind; but he has failed. He has then taken with him two or three brethren of the church, and they have together pleaded with the offender that he would do that which is right; but he is obstinate: even in the presence of two or three witnesses he persists in his trespass, and refuses to be won over by kindly entreaty. It only remains that they shall tell it to the church. The church is grieved; it hears the case patiently, and waits upon God in prayer. It asks guidance, and, at last, finding that there is no help for it, removes the member of the body who is not in true sympathy with the rest, and is acting as if he had not the life of God in him. This being done, according to Christ's rule—justly, impartially, lovingly, with prayer—that which is done by a few men and women assembled here below, is registered in the court above. What they have bound on earth is bound in heaven. What they have loosed on earth is also loosed in heaven. It is a happy privilege when they can loose the bound one. When repentance is expressed, when the backslider is restored, when the church has reason to believe that the work of the Spirit is truly in the heart of the offender, then the bond is loosed on earth, and it is also loosed in heaven. The meetings of God's servants for the necessary discipline of the church are not trifling meetings, but there is a divine power in them, since what they do is done in the name of Jesus Christ their Lord. Oh, that church-meetings were more generally looked at in this solemn light!

Next, we are introduced to the *prayer-meeting:* in the nineteenth verse we read, "Again I say unto you, that if two of you," *two* of you, "shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." It is a very little meeting, it could not be smaller to be a meeting at all. There are only two there, but they are two praying men, and two believers. They are two of the Lord's own servants, whose great concern is his kingdom; they are two earnest persons who very greatly desire the prosperity of the church. They are two of kindred spirit, agreeing in love to God and the truth, and they have talked over the matter, and considered it, and they feel moved by the Spirit of God to unite their supplications about one important subject. Will they meet together and pray in vain? As they are only two, will not the meeting fail to count with God? Assuredly not; the Lord Jesus Christ has aforehand left them this gracious promise, that if they shall agree on earth touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of his Father which is in heaven: they are only two, but this suffices to secure them the promised hearing.

Perhaps the exact petition which they offer may not apparently be answered. Remember that God often hears the prayer of our prayers, and answers *that* rather than our prayers themselves; by which I mean, that there is an inner soul within true prayer which is the quickening life of true supplication. The body of prayer may die, but the soul of prayer lives and abides for ever. If I am asked what my inmost heart prays for, I should reply, The heart of my prayer is—"The will of the Lord be done." Is not this the essence, quintessence, and extract of the prayer by which our Saviour taught us how to pray? He bade us say, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Is not this the finale of his own prayers, the entreaty of his passion, his deepest and yet his highest pleading, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt"? Now we want the will of the Lord to be *done:* we do not desire it to remain as a secret decree, but actually to be fulfilled; and it is ours, as it were, with the finger of prayer, to turn the folded leaves one by one, and exhibit them to the light of fact, so that the purpose of God may become an accomplished thing in answer to the prayer of his people. Mean we anything more than this by our prayers? I think that, when well instructed, this is neither more nor less than what we intend, and if it be really so, and we come together, delighting ourselves in the Lord, he will most certainly give us the desire of our hearts. When we come together with our wills sanctified into the likeness of the divine will, then our prayer succeeds, till it becomes no presumption even if we dare to say with Luther in one of his bold prayers, "Oh, my Lord, let *my* will be done this time!" He ventured to speak thus because he felt sure that his will must be in accordance with the divine will. Only there do you stand on solid ground; only there may you plead without any reserve for special blessings.

The prayer-meeting is not a farce, no waste of time, no mere pious amusement. Some in these times think so, but such shall be lightly esteemed. Surely they know not the omnipotence that lies in the pleas of God's people. The Lord has taken the keys of his royal treasury, and put them into the hand of faith. He has taken his sword from

the scabbard, and given it into the hand of the man mighty in prayer. He seems at times to have placed his sovereign sceptre in the hand of prayer. "Ask me concerning things to come: concerning my sons, command ye me." He permits us to speak with such boldness and daring that we overcome heaven by prayer, and dare to say to the covenant angel, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." If one Jacob can prevail over a wrestling angel, what can two do? What a victory would come to two who joined in the same wrestling! "One of you shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight." There is an accumulated power in united supplication: two do not only double the force, but multiply it tenfold. How soon the gate of mercy opens when two are knocking! God grant to each one of us a praying partner; when John pulls the oar of prayer let James join him in the hearty tug. Better still, may we always believe in our Father's presence at our prayer-meetings, so that we may find the words of Jesus true when he says, "It shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Now, thirdly, we come to a promise which includes *every meeting of any sort* or kind which is for Christ's glory. So long as it is a sacred meeting of saintly men and women for the purposes of devotion or service—for the purposes of prayer or praise, or whatever else may be most suitable for the occasion, here is the promise for them—"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This sanctions the church-meeting, this prospers the prayer-meeting. Overshadowing every gracious assembly of the chosen we see the great Shepherd of the sheep, who here expressly says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Now, first, we shall mention with regard to these meetings, *matters not essential;* then, secondly, we shall carefully mention *a matter most essential;* and, thirdly, we shall dwell upon *an assurance most encouraging.*

I. First, let us speak of MATTERS NOT ESSENTIAL.

At the outset, we know that *numbers are not essential,* for "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I." It is very important in a large church that there should be large gatherings for prayer, for it would be an evidence of a slighting of the ordinance of united supplication if a fair proportion of the members did not come together for that holy and blessed exercise. But, still, where that cannot be—where the church itself is small—where, for divers reasons which we need not here recapitulate, it is not possible for many to gather together—it is a very encouraging circumstance that numbers are not essential to success in prayer. "Where *two or three* are gathered together." The number is mentioned, I suppose, because that is about the smallest number that could make a congregation. We can hardly call it a congregation where the minister has to say, "Dearly beloved Roger, the Scripture moveth us in divers places," as we have heard was once done by a clergyman: truly it was an assembly of two, and so was within the number, and under the circumstances might find the Lord present. But two out of a large church would have been a wretched sign of decline. If two were all that met out of a great church it would be a sadly little company, and the blessing might be

withheld. Two or three are mentioned, not to encourage absence, but to cheer the faithful few who do not forget the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is.

Still, the number has this advantage, that it is the readiest congregation to be gathered. It is not difficult to make up two or three. A husband and wife: there are two. A husband and wife and a child: there are three. Or there may be two unmarried sisters, or a widow and child: two can be easily made up. Where there are no children, there may be a husband and a wife and a servant: and these are three. Where there is no wife, perhaps there are two brothers, or a brother and a sister, or perhaps three sisters; and where there is no relation, but a man lives alone, it is not impossible, surely, in the most deserted region for him to find one other or two others with whom he can meet. It is a very handy congregation, because it can meet in a bedroom; it can meet in a kitchen; it can meet in a closet: it can meet anywhere, for it is so small. It is also easily hidden away; in persecuting times two or three could get together in a corner, a cave, a cellar, or a garret. For the matter of that, two or three may be in prison together, and they can pray in one narrow cell; or they can do what Latimer and Ridley did when they stood back to back at the stake, and lifted up their hearts as one man. That was brave praying, when the two bishops stood to burn with devotion as well as to burn with fire for Christ's sake. I am sure that Jesus was in the midst of them when they met upon the faggots. Two people may meet in the street or in the field; they can get together in the corner of an omnibus or a train, and unite their supplications.

Two or three make a congregation which is among the small things, but who shall dare despise what God has blessed? I commend to you the frequent practice of praying by twos and threes. There was a minister who had a little society which he called the "Aaron and Hur Society." It consisted of two—one to hold up his right hand, and one to hold up his left, while, like Moses, he was on the mount pleading for Israel. We want this institution multiplied to any extent. We want the twos and threes as well as the one separately praying, and then a blessing will come. But numbers are not important at all; we need say no more about them except this,—I like to note that the text puts it "two or three," for, as one remarks, that is much better than "three or two." For if "three or two" are gathered together, they are getting smaller; but if it be "two or three," they are evidently upon the increase. If they have only increased from two to three, they have advanced fifty per cent., and that is something. If this congregation were to do that, where should we all be able to meet on the Sabbath? On week nights I would encourage you to try to increase till we fill the upper gallery as well as the rest of the building. "Two or three." It is a growing congregation: but still numbers are not essential to good speed in prayer.

Next, *the rank of the people is not important.* Does it say, "Where two or three *ministers* are gathered together in my name"? By no means. Ministers may expect the Lord to be in the midst of them, but they have no special promise as ministers: they must come before the Lord as plain believers. The "two or three" may be unable to utter

a word by way of teaching the great congregation, but this is not mentioned in the promise. Does it say, "Where two or three instructed Christians, advanced in experience, are met together"? No, there is no such limit expressed or implied. In the matter of prayer no special boon is set apart for those who are eminent in grace. We do not read, "Where two or three full-grown believers are met;" much less does it say, "Where two or three rich people are met together." No distinction is made. If they are the people of God, and if they are the little ones whom the Lord has been describing, humble and lowly in spirit, where two or three of such are met together in the Redeemer's name "there," says Jesus, "am I in the midst of them." It may be that a poor man and his wife are praying together before retiring for the night. The Lord is there. A couple of servants unite their supplications in the kitchen. The Lord is there. Two or three little boys have come out of school, and they love the Lord, and so they have met in a corner to pray. The Lord is there. Do you remember how Luther was encouraged while he, and Melancthon too, were down in the dumps about the Lord's work? They were dreadfully downcast; but as Luther passed by a room, he heard the voices of children and he stopped. Some women, the wives of good men, had gathered with a few holy children, and they were praying the Lord to let the gospel spread in the teeth of the Pope and all his friends from below. Luther went back and said, "It is all right. The children are praying to God. The Lord will hear them. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hath he ordained strength." So you see in the promise of the divine presence there is nothing said about numbers, and nothing about rank.

Neither is a word said as to *place*, except that it says "*where* two or three." "*Where*" means anywhere. In any place where two or three are met together in Christ's name there is he. Not in the cathedral only, but in the barn; not in the tabernacle only, but in the field. "Where" means everywhere. In the loneliest place, in the far-away forest, in an upper room, or on board ship, or in an hospital.

"Jesus, where'er thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy-seat:
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground;

"For thou within no walls confined,
Inhabitest the humble mind;
Such ever bring thee where they come,
And going, take thee to their home."

Anywhere Christ will be with you when you are with him in prayer. Have you never read how the Covenanters, when the times of peace came on, and they could worship in the kirk, yet, nevertheless, often looked back with sadness to the glorious days they had in the mosses and on the bleak hill-sides when they were hunted by Claverhouse's dragoons, and the Lord covered them with the skirts of his garments? See the preacher reading his text by the lightning flash, and hear his voice sounding afterwards amid the thick darkness! The saints who had gathered together to hear the word of God had an overpowering sense of his presence which nothing could excel. Anywhere

we may meet for prayer and expect Jesus to be in the midst of us. The place is not essential even in the lowest degree. When I see people running out every morning to church, it savours of a superstition which ought to have died out long ago. When you look into the church you will find no great number assembled; generally the rector and one or two of the family make up the company. But if the whole parish came trooping out to church, I should say that they had better stay at home and pray with their families. Family prayer is a better institution than the tinkling of a bell every morning, and the collecting of people in a church. Have a bell of your own, and be your own priest, and open your Bible, and pray yourself with your children, and that will be a more acceptable sacrifice than if you plod in your superstition half-a-mile to a so-called sacred place to enjoy the voice of a supposed priestly man. Dedicate your parlour; consecrate your sitting-room; make your kitchen into a church for God: for there is no sacredness in bricks, and mortar, and stone, and stained glass. The outside of a church is as holy as the inside. Far ought such an age as this to be from the revolting superstition which makes the houses of the godly to be common and unclean in order to magnify the parish church. May we get back to the simplicity of Christ! "Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, shall men worship the Father." The time is coming, yea and now is, when in every place God seeketh spiritual worshippers who worship him in spirit and in truth.

And will you please to notice this, that as numbers and rank and place are all non-essentials, so also is the *time?* There may be—there ought to be to us from holy habit—an hour of prayer. But though that be especially and rightly the hour of prayer—for he that has no appointed time for prayer may probably forget to pray—yet still that pious custom must never degenerate into superstition as though heaven's gate were opened at a certain quarter of an hour, and shut during all the rest of the day. Meet whenever you please, no time will be unseasonable. All hours are good, from twelve o'clock at night to twelve o'clock the next night, and so onward. The hour of prayer is the hour of need, the hour of opportunity, the hour of desire, the hour when you can come together. Let every hour, according as occasion permits you, become the hour of prayer. I have heard it said sometimes in the country, "Well, we cannot get our people together for a prayer-meeting because they are busy at the harvest." If the preacher were to get up at four o'clock in the morning, and hold a meeting for prayer out in the field itself while yet the dew is on the grass, would it not be a capital thing for him and for his flock? Suppose the people cannot come to pray at six o'clock in the evening, make it seven, make it eight, make it nine, make it ten. Perhaps the young folks had better be in bed at so late an hour, and there may thus be legitimate objections to some hours for public gatherings; but yet twos and threes may sit up as late as they like to pray, and no policeman will come round and tell them to go to bed. Our rulers do not ring the curfew now. The Lord our God doth neither slumber nor sleep; he is ever waiting to be gracious.

And, once more, there is nothing said here about *the form which the meeting is to take.* "Where two or three are met together in my name,

there am I in the midst of them." "They are going to break bread together." Very well, they are quite at liberty to do so, and if they have met in the Lord's name, he will be in the midst of them. "But they are going to hear a sermon." All right: so they may. Preaching is an ordinance of God, and he will be in the midst of them. "But they are neither going to hold the communion, nor to hear a sermon; they are going to pray." Quite right: the Lord will be in their midst. "But they are not going to pray, that is to say, vocally; they are going to read a chapter, and sit and think of it." Quite right: the Lord will be in the midst of them. "But they are not even going to read, or sing, or pray vocally: they are going to sit still." The Lord will be in the midst of them if they meet in the name of Jesus. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Do not be the dupes of those who say, "This one particular form of service is the only one." Christ has not put it so. And we will not be brought into any bondage by those who call themselves "Brethren," and are the most unbrotherly brothers that ever lived. They tell us that we are all wrong: we cannot expect to have the Lord with us. To answer these is not difficult. Dear brothers, we are not at all grieved by your talking as you do, for we know you are wrong, since *we have the Lord with us*. It does not matter at all to us what you say so long as we enjoy *his* company, and see the prosperity which *he* gives to us. So long as we do not quarrel with one another once every few years, we are not anxious to follow you in your methods, which are illustrated by your bitter feuds. As long as we do not split up into the most miserable sections of sectarians that ever disgraced the name of Christ, we shall not be greatly wounded by any remarks which you have to make. Condemn and welcome, for your condemnations are mere wind. May your objurgations be blessed to us, and may they ease your minds, also, by relieving your minds of a little of your bitterness. We believe that any form which true worship takes is a form which the Lord Jesus Christ not only tolerates, but sanctions, if his Spirit be there. But if you meet without that Spirit of God, even though you should think yourselves infallibly correct in the form which your meeting assumes, that form will be of very little use to you. I bless God for the grand liberty of worship which is given here. I bless God that he has not laid down this regulation and that, but has left his people to his own free Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

So much on non-essentials.

II. But now, secondly, there is A MATTER WHICH IS MOST ESSENTIAL, and that is, that they should be gathered *in Christ's name*. Does not this mean that the gathering must be that of Christians met together as Christians to have fellowship with Jesus Christ and so with one another? Does it not mean that they must be met together in obedience to his will as they understand it, to carry out his will as they find it in the New Testament, and as the Spirit of God opens up that New Testament to them? Does it not also mean that they must be met together distinctly for the Lord's purposes?—to honour Christ, to bring

glory to his name, to worship him? They must be met together not to a kind of mystic, invisible, unknown Christ, but in his name, for Christ has a name—a distinct personality, a character; and that must be known, loved, and honoured; or else we have not met in his name. Are we not to meet because he bids us meet, and because we have his authority for meeting, his authority for breaking bread, his authority for baptism, his authority for prayer, his authority for praise, his authority for the ministry of the word, his authority for reading the Scriptures, his authority for mutual edification, or whatever form of worship seems most suitable? We meet not to carry out our own devices, but to carry out that which is appointed us by our Lord himself.

And does not this gathering into his name mean that we are, first, to be known by his name, and then to get close to one another by drawing more and more near to him? The way to be gathered together is to be gathered by him and to him. If all press to the centre, they all press to one another. If each man's aim be personal fellowship with Christ, personal knowledge of Christ, personal trust in Christ, personal adoration of Christ, personal service to Christ, and the getting of a personal likeness to Christ, then we are all coming together. While our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, we also have fellowship with all the saints. This should be the great object of all our gatherings, to be brought more fully into Christ; and all of us must meanwhile believe that Jesus is in the midst and we must come together unto him. You do not meet to-night to listen to a certain preacher, but because through that preacher you have been helped to get nearer to the Lord Jesus Christ, and, therefore, you are glad to hear his voice, and glad to worship God with those friends with whom you have fellowship in Christ. You do well to come where you have found Christ before: and you do well to stay away from any gathering wherein you have not found Christ. Some, as they go out of the place where they usually worship, are sadly compelled to cry, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Do not go where Jesus is not present; and if distinctly you are obliged to say, "I have heard sermon after sermon almost without mention of his name; I have gone for months together, and I have not had a sweet thought of heavenly fellowship arising out of the service;" then do not go there again. Do not go to any church or meeting-house merely because you have been in the habit of going. If your father used to live in Islington, but has now removed, you do not think it needful to go and call at his empty house: do you? Go where the Lord has met with you, and where you may expect that he will meet with you again. Sabbaths are too precious to be thrown away by sitting still to be starved. Even a cow does not care to be tied up in an empty stall, and a horse does not run to an empty manger. Seek the Lord Jesus, and do not rest till you find him. We must gather into his name and get closer and closer to it, or else the Lord's day will run to waste, and barrenness will devour our souls.

III. Now, as usual, I have taken up too much time with these first two heads, for the last is the most important, and that is, AN ASSURANCE MOST ENCOURAGING—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

First then, very briefly, *how is the Lord Jesus there?* Notice the

exact words. Catch the gracious sense. He does not say, "I *will be* there," but he does say, "I *am* there." He is the first at the gathering; "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there AM I." Not "I will be," though that is true; but he puts it in a more divine fashion,—"There am I." Jesus is there already before another arrives. He is the first in the congregation, the first comer in the assembly, and they come gathering to him. He is the centre, and they come to him. "There am I."

How is he there? As we, his people, meet, he is there, because he is in every one of them. It is a blessed thing to see Christ in his people. Did you ever try to do that? I know some who try to see the old man in Christ's people. It does not take them long to see the body of sin and death, and it is not a refreshing sight when they do see it. But, oh, to see Christ in his people—what a charming sight it is! And I think, with regard to every child of God that I know, that I can see a little more of Christ in him than I can see in myself. I cultivate the practice of endeavouring to see my Lord in all his people, for he IS there, and it is irreverent not to honour him. He IS with them, and *is* in them; why should we doubt it? That is something worth remembering. If so many temples of the Holy Ghost come together, why, surely, the Holy Ghost himself is there, and the place whereon they stand is holy ground. Jesus is in their thoughts, in their objects, in their desires; ay, and in their groans, in their sorrows, in their spirits, in their inmost souls. Where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is he in the midst of them.

And, next, he is with us in his Word. When the Book is opened, it is not mere words, it is the living and "incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever"; and the Christ is in it as the immortal life, the secret life-germ in every seed that we sow. Christ is the way, if we teach men the road to heaven. Christ is the truth, if we preach the doctrines of grace. Christ is the life, if we enjoy and feed upon his precious name. Where his Word is preached, there he is; for it shall not return to him void, but it shall prosper in the thing whereto he has sent it.

Christ is in his ordinances. He has not dissociated himself from baptism, which is the blessed symbol in which his death, burial, and resurrection are clearly set forth. He has not separated himself from that other ordinance, in which we behold his passion and see the way in which we become partakers of it, by feeding upon his body and his blood. He has promised to be with us even to the end of the world in the keeping up of those divine memorials of his incarnation and atonement, his life and his death.

And then the Lord Jesus Christ is with the assembly by his Spirit. The Spirit is his representative, whom he has sent as the Comforter to abide with us for ever. You must have felt him sometimes convincing you of sin, humbling you, and bowing you down; then cheering you, comforting you, enlightening you, guiding you, relieving you, sustaining you, sanctifying you. Oh, what light he brings! What life he brings! What love he brings! What joy he brings! When the Spirit of God is in the midst of God's people what merry days they have! What days of heaven upon earth!

Does not this fact that Christ is among his people show us that he must be divine? How can he be everywhere in all the assemblies of his people unless he is the omnipresent God? There may be professing Christians who feel a kind of fellowship with Socinians, but I have none. I will not call them Unitarians, for I am as truly a Unitarian myself as any of them can be. I no more believe in three Gods than I believe in thirty gods. There is but one God to me, and therefore I am in that sense a Unitarian, and Socinians have no right to the name merely because they deny the Godhead of our Lord Jesus. We believe Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one God; but Jesus Christ is God, and whosoever casts that truth away casts away eternal life. How can he enter into heaven if he does not know Christ as the everlasting Son of the Father? He must be God, since he has promised to be in ten thousand places at one time, and no mere man could do that.

Next, *where is the Lord in the assembly?* He has promised to be with his people; but where is he? "There am I *in the midst of them.*" Not up in the corner, but here in the midst of them is the Lord. He is the centre to which all saints gather. He is the sun in the heavens lighting all. He is the heart in the midst of the body giving life to all the members. "In the midst of them." Is not that delightful? The Lord Jesus Christ does not come into the assembly of his people to bless the minister only. No, you are all equally near in proportion to the grace of nearness you have received. He is in the midst of you, in the centre of all hearts. Like the centre of a wheel, from which all the spokes radiate, Jesus Christ is the middle of the company. Armies place the king or some great general in the heart of the host, in the place of honour and command; so, as our army marches to battle, our King is in the centre. The King is in the midst of the saints in all his glory, and his presence is their strength and their assurance of victory. Glory be to our present Lord: he is in the midst of us now.

And if he be in the midst of his people, *what will he do?* Why, he is there to sanction every little gathering of his people—to say to the twos and threes, "You are not Dissenters, for you have met with me. You are not Nonconformists: you are conformed to me, and I am one with you. You are the Established Church—you two or three. I have established you in my everlasting love; those that meet in my name I have established them, and I have endowed them; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. I sanction your assemblies if you are my people." He is there *to bless* those who supplicate and adore. But, mark you, the text does not say this in so many words; and do not you say it, brother, next time you pray. Did I not hear you say, "Lord, thou hast said, 'Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them, *and that to bless them, and do them good*'"? That last little bit is your own. That addition is not in the Bible, for it is not the Lord's way to say what never need be said. What other blessing do we want than Christ in the midst of us? If he is there, the blessing is not what he gives: but *he himself is the blessing.* It is not what he does: *it is himself.* It is not even what he says: *it is himself.* Oh, blessed be his name for what he gives, and blessed be his name for what he does, and blessed be his name for what he says: but still more blessed be his name because he *himself* loved

us, and gave *himself* for us, and now comes *himself* into the midst of his people.

Now, dear friends, if Christ himself be in the midst of his people, he will bring us peace, just as he did when he dropped into the assembly of the eleven, the doors being shut. He stood and said, "Peace be unto you!" and when he had said that he showed them his hands and his side. It was himself, his own peace, and his own person which made his disciples glad. Then he said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." This was his own commission from his own lips to his own servants, and having said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Thus his own breath and his own Spirit coming upon them made them strong for service, and that is what he means when he says, "I am in the midst of them."

Does not this make our meetings delightful—Christ in the midst of us? Does not this make our meetings important? How one ought to strain a point to be there! If we have met with Christ aforetime we shall not bear to be away. We shall long to meet him again, and count it a great denial if we must be absent. Does not this make our meetings influential? The gatherings of God's people are centres of influence. When the gathering contains but two or three, if Christ is there, the eternal power and Godhead are present; and out of this Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Where even two or three are met together, and he is in the midst of them, "there breaks he the arrows of the bow, the sword, and the shield, and the battle." He will make his power known, and the glory of his grace shall go forth out of those little companies even to the ends of the earth.

"Where two or three, with sweet accord,
Obedient to their sovereign Lord,
Meet to recount his acts of grace,
And offer solemn prayer and praise:

"'There,' says the Saviour, 'will I be,
Amid this little company:
To them unveil my smiling face,
And shed my glories round the place.'"

"Oh, but," say you, "the pulpit is the great power of God, is it not?" I answer, it is so because of the prayers of God's people. One may speak, but what of that, unless the rest shall pray? Preaching is God's ordinance—his battle-axe and weapons of war; but, as far as the church is concerned, the arm that wields these weapons must be the prayer of the whole body of the faithful—the gathering together of the saints in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Wherefore, forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is," but come ye together as often as ye have opportunity, not neglecting other duties, but balancing them one with the other. He says, "Seek ye my face." Let your cry be, "Thy face, Lord, will we seek." When Sir Thomas Abney was Lord Mayor of London, in the middle of the banquet which takes place on the first night, he disappeared for a quarter-of-an-hour, and when he came back, he said to the friends around him that he had been keeping a particular engagement with a most intimate friend, and so he had retired for awhile. That appointment was to have family prayer

with his household in the Mansion House, and that gathering for prayer he would not have given up on any account whatever. Say to all other things, "You must stand back, I have a particular appointment; I must meet the Lord Jesus Christ with two or three of his people. He says that he will be there, and I should not like him to say, 'Where is my servant? Where is my son? Where is my daughter? Are they absent when I am here?'"

It is such a blessing to get to know the Lord Jesus personally. I heard the other day of a famous infidel, an agnostic,—that is, an ignoramus, a person who knows nothing,—and he went to a certain house to meet an elderly lady of considerable literary renown. He was told that she believed in the Word of God, and was a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus, so he thought that he would have a word with her before he went away. "Madam," said he, "I have been astonished to hear one thing of you. I hear that you believe in the Bible." "Yes, sir," she said, "every word of it." "And pray, Madam," he said, "however came you to believe in that book?" She replied, "One of the principal reasons that I have for believing in the Book is that I am intimately acquainted with the Author of it." That was a blessed answer. Faith gets to know Christ; and so, knowing Christ, and meeting him in the midst of his people, it becomes armed against all unbelief, and goes forth in its panoply conquering and to conquer. So will it be with you, beloved, if you meet the Well-beloved alone in your closets, and if you add to this a frequent attendance at the holy assembly. I pray you, do not let us have to complain that one of you is away. Come always. My heart will rejoice if our meetings are filled with men and women who there seek communion with Jesus. Come, for Jesus is with us. Come, for it would be most unseemly for him to be here and you away. I pray you come, and make this house like heaven, which is thronged with shining ones who rejoice because Jesus is in their midst. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xviii.

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HIGH DOCTRINE AND BROAD DOCTRINE.

A Sermon,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER-HALL.

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."—John vi. 37.

THESE two sentences have been looked upon as representing two sides of Christian doctrine. They enable us to see it from two stand-points —the Godward and the manward. The first sentence contains what some call high doctrine. If by "high" they mean "glorious towards God," I fully agree with them; for it is a grand, God-honouring truth which our Lord Jesus declares in these words,—"*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.*" Some have styled this side of truth Calvinistic; but while it is true that Calvin taught it, so also did Augustine, and Paul, and our Lord himself, whose words these are. However, I will not quarrel with those who see in this sentence a statement of the great truth of predestinating grace. The second sentence sets forth blessed, encouraging, evangelical doctrine, and is in effect a promise and an invitation,—"*Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*" This is a statement without limitation of any kind: it has been thought to leave the free grace of God open to the free will of man, so that whosoever pleases may come and may be sure that he will not be refused. We have no permission to pare down either sentence, nor is there the slightest need to do so. The first sentence appears to me to say that God has chosen a people, and has given these people to Christ, and these people must and shall come to Christ, and so shall be saved. The second truth declares that every man who comes to Christ shall be saved, since he shall not be cast out, and that implies that he shall be received and accepted. These are two great truths; let us carry them both with us, and they will balance each other.

I was once asked to reconcile these two statements, and I answered, "No, I never reconcile friends." These two passages never fell out: they are perfectly agreed. It is folly to imagine a difference, and then set about removing it. It is like making a man of straw, and then going out to fight with it. The grand declaration of the purpose of God that he will save his own is quite consistent with the widest declaration that whosoever will come to Christ shall be saved. The pity is that

it ever should be thought difficult to hold both truths; or that, supposing there is a difficulty, we should have thought it our duty to remove it. Believe me, my dear hearers, the business of removing religious difficulties is the least remunerative labour under heaven. The truest way is to accept the difficulty wherever you find it in God's word, and to exercise your faith upon it. It is unreasonable to suppose that faith is to be exempted from trials: all the other graces are exercised, and why should not faith be put to the test? I often feel a joy within my spirit in having to believe what I cannot understand; and sometimes when I have to say to myself, "How can it be?" I find a joy in replying that it is so written, and therefore it must be so. Instead of all reasoning stands the utterance of God. Our Father speaks, and doubts are silenced: his Spirit writes, and we believe. I feel great pleasure in gliding down the river of revelation, upon a voyage of discovery, and hour by hour obtaining fresh knowledge of divine truth; but where I come to an end of progress, and see my way blocked up by a sublimely awful difficulty, I find equal pleasure in casting anchor under the lee of the obstacle, and waiting till the pilot tells me what next to do. When we cannot go through a truth, we may be led over it, or round it; and what matters? Our highest benefit comes not of answering riddles, but of obeying commands by the power of love. Suppose we can see no further into the subject—what then? Shall we trouble about that? Must there not be an end of human knowledge somewhere? May we not be perfectly satisfied for God to appoint the boundary of understanding? Let us not therefore run our heads against difficulties of our own invention, and certainly not against those which God has seen fit to leave for us.

Take, then, these two truths, and know that they are equally precious portions of one harmonious whole. Let us not quibble over them, or indulge a foolish favouritism for one and a prejudice against the other; but let us receive both with a candid, large-hearted love of truth, such as children of God should exhibit. We are not called upon to explain, but to accept. Let us believe if we cannot reconcile. Here are two jewels, let us wear them both. As surely as this Book is true, God has a people whom he has chosen, and whom Christ has redeemed from among men; and these must and shall by sovereign grace be brought in due time to repentance and faith, for not one of them shall ever perish. But yet is it equally true, that whosoever among the sons of men shall come and put his trust in Christ shall receive eternal life. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

> "None are excluded hence but those
> Who do themselves exclude.
> Welcome the learned and polite,
> The ignorant and rude."

The two truths of my text are by no means inconsistent the one with the other: they are perfectly agreed. Happy is the man who can believe them both, whether he sees their agreement or does not see it.

I was cruising one day in the western Highlands. It had been a splendid day, and the glorious scenery had made our journey like an excursion to Fairy Land; but it came to an end, for darkness and night

asserted their primeval sovereignty. Right ahead was a vast headland of the isle of Arran. How it frowned against the evening sky! The mighty rock seemed to overhang the sea. Just at its base was a little bay, and into this we steamed, and there we lay at anchorage all night, safe from every wind that might happen to be seeking out its prey. In that calm loch we seemed to lie in the mountain's lap while its broad shoulders screened us from the wind. Now, the first part of my text, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me," rises like a huge headland high into the heavens. Who shall scale its height? Upon some it seems to frown darkly. But here at the bottom lies the placid, glassy lake of infinite love and mercy: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Steam into it, and be safe under the shadow of the great rock. You will be the better for the mountain-truth as your barque snugly reposes within the glittering waters at its foot; while you may thank God that the text is not all mountain to repel you, you will be grateful that there is enough of it to secure you.

First, I shall bid you view that goodly mountain, and then we shall sail into that pleasant loch.

I. Consider, then, with reverential joy THE ETERNAL PURPOSE. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he found that the mass of the people rejected him, turned round upon them, and said, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." He knew in his own heart, however, that if *they* refused him all would not do so: a number would assuredly believe on him. Therefore he boldly said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." He threw this grand fact in the teeth of his fierce revilers. It was his own comfort, and their rebuke. Now, I do not want to throw it at anybody to-night; on the contrary, I desire to use it as a beckoning finger to any troubled heart that longs to come to Jesus and be saved.

I saw the other day, round a gentleman's park, a very strong and lofty palisade, and to complete the exclusive apparatus a superabundant number of tenter-hooks were nailed upon the top of the fence, and a liberal quantity half-way up. I somewhat jocosely observed upon the kindness of the proprietor, in placing so many nails for the boys to climb up by, and so many more for them to hold on by when once they were up. "Why," said my companion, "those tenter-hooks would tear fingers and clothes to pieces; they are no help to climbers." "No," I replied, "no more help to climbers than the remarks which your minister made upon the sovereignty of God could be considered to be a help to seekers of the Lord Jesus." The good man set forth the truth in the most awkward and pernicious manner possible; not making thereof steps for earnest climbers, but tenter-hooks for unwelcome intruders. I never yet saw such a crowd desirous of salvation that there was the slightest call for fences and tenter-hooks to keep them out: but I do see so many tremblers needing encouragement, and so many doubters needing instruction, that I delight to turn every word, and promise, and doctrine of the Lord into sweet invitations to all around me to come and welcome to the great heart of the Crucified. I am not afraid that too many will come; my fears are all in the opposite direction. Oh, that I could hope that all my present hearers would come to Jesus at once!

First notice, carefully, that if all that the Father giveth to Christ shall

come to him, *then some people shall most surely come to Christ;* and why should not you be among them? This seems to me to be a sweet suggestion for the help of despondency when she is at her worst: some must come to Christ, why should not I come? When the devil says to you, "You cannot come to Christ," and you yourself feel as if you could not come; when sin hampers you, when doubt drags you down, when you cannot do what you want to do—still it is decreed and determined that some people must come, then why not you? By divine decree they shall come; why should not you be among them? Does not that help you? If God blesses it, you will not longer sit on the borders of despair. Suppose there is a plague in the city, but there are some people predestinated to be healed. I should be glad to know of that fact. I should be almost glad of it if I was sure that I was not one of the favoured ones, for I rejoice in the good of others: but I should be still more glad to press to the physician with this assurance upon my mind—Some must be healed: why should not I? There is a famine in the land. I hear that it is revealed by a sure prophet that a certain number never shall die of famine. Then why should not I outlive the dreadful days and be among them? Why not? I hear one say, "Suppose I am not one of God's elect." To him I answer, "Suppose you are." Better still, suppose that you leave off supposing altogether, and just go to Jesus Christ and see. To go to him is your wisdom; your immediate business, as laid down in his Word, therefore, delay not. Instead of shutting myself *out*, as some do, because it is written, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me": I shut myself *in*, and say, "Then I will be among them." Why should I not? Oh, Lord, if thou hast ordained that some shall come, then I see that to them no difficulties can be insuperable, and I will therefore come to thee myself, and in thy name enter in where every coming one is welcome.

In the next place I find that *those that come to Christ, according to this text, come because of the Father and the Son.* Read it. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." That is, they come to Jesus. Why is it that they are made to come? Because the Father has given them to Christ. Why is it that they shall come? Is it because there is some good thing in them? No, there is nothing said upon that point either one way or the other. Is it because they have strong wills and firm determinations, and therefore come? The Scripture is equally silent upon that point, except that it says elsewhere that the New Birth is not of the will of man. The reason that is given why they shall come to Jesus is because something was done for them by the Father and by the Son. Why, then, should not I come? Suppose I am weak: suppose I am sinful: suppose I am seven times more sinful than anybody else; yet since this "shall come" depends not on the character of those to whom the promise is made, but upon a certain something done for them by the Father and the Son, why should not I be among those for whom the Father and the Son have done this certain thing, and why should not I therefore be made to come to Jesus? There never was a soul that really wanted to come to Jesus but what it could come and did come. There never was a pining, longing sinner that was long kept away from Christ. When he wanted Christ, Christ wanted him a hundred times as much. If thou hast the least desire or the faintest longing after the

Lord Jesus Christ, then the cords of love are about thee, and his mighty hands are drawing home those cords. Yield to the sweet pressure and thou shalt come, not because of what thou art, or what thou ever hast been, but because of what the Father is doing, and because of what the Son is doing. It is written, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him;" but when he is drawing thou canst come. The Father is drawing you, since you are longing to come, and are anxious to find a Saviour. Now, do not turn this truth about so as to set it edgeways, and make a *chevaux de frise* of it to keep yourself from getting to Christ. The doctrine of the divine purpose is not a thorn-hedge to keep you off from the tree of life: on the contrary, you are bound to regard it as an open door. "Some must come. Why not I? Those that come do so because of something done for them of the Father and of the Son; and why should not that have been done for me? Why should not I also draw near to God?"

Notice, thirdly, that *these people are all of them saved because they come to Christ.* Observe the words—"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." They are not saved otherwise than by coming to Christ. Here are certain people that are different from others, for the Father has given them to Christ. Yes, but it does not matter how different they are from others: they have to be saved in the same way as other people. There is no way of salvation specially prepared for these peculiar people; they must follow the King's highway. The one common way of salvation is by coming to Christ, and all that the Father has given to Christ must come in by this gate. This is the one door that God has opened: there is no other; there never shall be any other. Come: pluck up heart, my dear friend,—thou that art bowing thy head like a bulrush,—the best saint in heaven found his way thither by a simple trust in Jesus Christ. Why canst not thou get there in the same way? Many sinners of the deepest dye have been saved through Jesus Christ, and why should not you be saved in the same way? Ask Peter, and James, and John, and Paul, and all the rest of them, whether they entered into heaven by a private bridge thrown across for them alone; and they will tell you that they were saved by the one Redeemer. As no Scripture is of private interpretation, so be sure that there is no private and secret Saviour for a few favoured persons. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. God's elect can only be saved by coming to Christ. Jesus says, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;" for they cannot be saved else. Coming to Christ is the one essential thing. "Oh," says one, "I sometimes wish that I knew whether I was one of God's elect." Why should you wish to know anything out of its turn, when you can learn every truth that you need by studying other truths which lead up to it? You come to Christ, and you shall know that you were given to Christ; for none come to him but those who are his, and by their coming to him they give the best evidence of their election. You know what the brother in Cornwall said to Malachi, who was rather a stout Calvinist. He said, "Now, Malachi, I owe you £2. Before I discharge the debt I want you to tell me whether I am predestinated to pay you." Malachi opened wide his hand, and said, "Put the £2 there, and I will tell you directly." Like most sensible folk, he preferred to prophesy after the

event; and there are many advantages in keeping to that method. It is evidently the natural order of things for uninspired folk. Whether the Father gave me to Christ or not, I cannot discover till I know whether I have come to Christ. When I know that I have truly come to Christ with all my heart, then I am certain that I was given to Christ, and I find no difficulty in so believing; yea, my heart is glad to think that I am saved in the same way as others are saved.

Yet, once again, *from this text it is most clear that, if I come to Christ, the Father gave me to Christ.* If I, whoever I may be, do but simply trust Jesus —for that is the coming here meant—then I am one whom the Father gave to his Son. If, just as I am, I cast myself upon his blood and righteousness, and become his disciple, sworn to follow him, hoping by his help to tread in his footsteps: then I may know that, long before the day-star knew its place, or planets ran their round, the Eternal Father had looked upon me with eyes of everlasting love, and that he still accepts me, and will never cast me away. Is it not so? "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;" and if I have come, then the Father hath given me to Christ: the great question is answered, the eternal mystery is unveiled, and my spirit may rejoice in God my Saviour, and in all the precious things of that everlasting covenant which is ordered in all things and sure.

So much about that huge, overhanging mass of rock. Of that I am going to say no more; only under its lee I have anchored long ago, and at that anchorage I mean still to remain. Since I have come to Jesus I know that I belong to him by the Great Father's gift, and I am right well assured that the purpose of God shall be fulfilled in me, and that he will assuredly bring me, with all the rest of his elect, to his kingdom and glory, where we shall see his face for ever. This may be called old-fashioned doctrine: I care not what it is called, it is my life, and I dare rest my soul's weight upon it for time and for eternity.

II. Now we enter into smooth water: the mystery is opened, let us partake of the joy of it. We have, in the second place, to speak to you for a little time on THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL—"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." You may forget my first head if you like, especially if you are troubled by it, but I earnestly beseech you to recollect the second.

"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." This is one of the most generous gospel texts that I do remember to have met with between the covers of this book. Generous, first, as to *the character to whom the promise is made.* "Him that cometh to me:" that is the character. The man may have been guilty of an atrocious sin, too black for mention; but if he comes to Christ he shall not be cast out. To that atrocious sin he may have added many others, till the condemning list is full and long; but if he comes to Christ he shall not be cast out. He may have hardened his neck against the remonstrances of prudence, and the entreaties of mercy; he may have sinned deeply and wilfully; but if he comes to Christ he shall not be cast out. He may have made himself as black as night—as black as hell; yet, if he shall come to Christ, the Lord will not cast him out. I cannot tell what kind of persons may have come into this Hall to-night; but if burglars, murderers, and dynamite-men were here, I would still bid them come to

Christ, for he will not cast them out. I suppose that the most of you are tolerably decent as to moral character; and to you I say, if you come to Christ he will not cast you out. Children of godly parents, hearers of the word, he will not cast you out. You who lack only one thing, but that the one thing needful, he will not cast you out. Backsliders! Are there some such here, who have almost forgotten the way to God's sanctuary, for whom the Sabbath-bell proclaims no Sabbath now? Come you to Jesus, and he will not cast you out. Oh, you Londoners, you have grown weary of God's house, and of God's day—millions of you; but if with all your irreligion you are here to-night, the truth holds good of you also,—if you trust in Jesus, he will not cast you out.

If, amidst this company, there should be some whose characters we had better not describe, and who already shrink into themselves at the very idea of being picked out, and mentioned by name; yet if such persons come to Jesus, he will gladly receive them. Be your character what it may, you who are wrapped in mystery, you shall not be cast out. I wish that I could put this to those who are troubled about a life of grievous sin; for to the life-long transgressor the text is still true. My Lord proclaims an act of oblivion concerning all the past. It shall be as though it had never been. Through Jesus Christ, if you will but believe in him, the whole past shall be rolled up, and put away, as though it had never known an existence, and you yourself shall be born again. When Naaman came up from washing in the Jordan we read that "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean;" and so it shall be with you. The old man took the fair-haired child upon his knee, and threaded his fingers through its locks, and said, "Young child, God keep you from the sin into which I have plunged. My old life is full of evil. It is now almost over, and I am past hope. Would God I were a child again!" Lo, the angel of mercy whispers to any one in that condition, "You may be a child again!" The man a hundred years of age may yet be made a child; and he that is a grey-beard in infamy may yet become a babe in innocence through the cleansing power of the water and the blood which flowed from the riven side of Jesus. Go ye, and write it athwart the brow of night; write it in new stars if you can—"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Then hang it up over the mid-day heavens, and let the sun cast all his beams upon it, till it seems writ in the splendour of God—"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." The character who will be received is not mentioned, lest in mentioning one sinner another should seem to be excluded. No limit is set to the extent of sin: any "him" in all the world—any blaspheming, devilish "him" that comes to Christ shall be welcomed. I use strong words that I may open wide the gate of mercy. Any "him" that comes to Christ—though he come from slum or tap-room, betting-ring or gambling-hell, prison or brothel—Jesus will in no wise cast out.

Further, this text is a very generous one because *it gives no limit to the coming.* The only limit to the way of coming is that they do come *to Christ.* I have known some come to Christ running to him—a willing, speedy, earnest pace. You read of that in the gospels. They were so glad to hear of a Saviour that they flew to him at once. Many young children and young people do this, and they are blessed in the

deed. Come along with you, ye lively and tender spirits; he will not cast you out if you leap and rush to him. If you run all on a sudden to him to-night—if you make a dash for Christ—he will not cast you out.

Alas! a great many, when they come to Christ, advance very limpingly. They are burdened with a huge load of sin and fettered with doubts and fears, and so they make slow progress. They do not look to Jesus and live, all at once. They keep looking here and looking there, instead of looking *to him*. They are a long while in coming, for they are afraid, and ignorant and dull. Never mind, brother. The snail got into the Ark; and if you come to Christ he will not cast you out though your pace be sadly sluggish. Some look to Christ as soon as they hear of him, with clear, bright eyes like those of Rachel. Oh, such a look! They seem to drink in Christ and his salvation all at once with those bright eyes. But I have met with many whose look is like that of Leah, who had tender eyes: they look through the mists of their doubt, and the showers of their tears, and they do not half see Christ as they should. Ay, but that half-clouded look will save them. Any looking will save you if it is looking *to Christ;* and any coming if it is coming *to Christ,* will save you. Coming to sacraments may condemn you; coming to priests will ruin you; but coming to Christ will save you. If your simple faith takes hold of Christ's salvation there is life in that grip. If your thoughts think of him, if your heart embraces him, if your soul trusts him, however weakly and imperfectly you do it, he will not cast you out. Oh, this is glorious truth to my mind; is it not so to yours? So long as we do but come to him, our Saviour will not cast us away: I feel glad to be preaching this gospel in Exeter-hall; are you not glad to hear it? If you are not you are a sorry set.

Thirdly, *there is no limit here as to time.* "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" is a glorious, free utterance, compassing every age. There may be some little children here; indeed, I am glad to see boys and girls mingling with the congregation. Listen to me, my children! I am always glad to see you, and we preachers make a great mistake if we do not preach to you. Oh, dear John and Jane, Mary and Thomas, I wish you would come to Christ while you are yet young, and put your trust in him, and become young Christians. There is no reason why you should not. You are old enough to die, and you are old enough to sin, and you are old enough to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Why should you not do so at once? When I was just about fifteen years of age I was helped by God's Spirit to cast myself upon Christ; and did I ever repent that I came to Jesus so soon? No; I wish that I could have come fifteen years before, and that I had known Christ as soon as ever I learned to know my mother. Some of you have heard about Jesus from your infancy; his name was part of the music with which your mother sang you to sleep. Oh, that you may know Jesus by faith as well as by hearing! Do not think that you have to wait till you are grown up before you may come to Jesus. We have baptized quite a number of boys and girls of ten, eleven, and twelve. I spoke the other day with a little boy nine years of age; and I tell you that he knew more about Christ than ever so many grey-headed

men do; and he loved Jesus most heartily. As the sweet child talked to me about what Christ had done for him, he brought tears into my eyes, to see how happily and brightly he could speak of what he had felt in his own soul of the Saviour's power to bless. You young children are like rosebuds; and you know everybody likes a rosebud better than a full-blown rose. My Lord Jesus will gladly receive you as rosebuds. Offer yourselves to him, for he will not cast you away. I am sure he never will.

If any here are in the opposite extremity of life, I would remind them that "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" applies to the aged as well as to the young. I heard it said by a minister—a very earnest man—that if persons were not converted before they were five and forty, he hardly believed that they would ever be converted afterwards; and he gave it as a note of his observation that he had not seen any persons converted after five and forty. I wished that I had been in his pulpit. I should not have questioned his statements, but I would have overlaid them with others of another character. Surely this brother had been living in some minute hamlet or other; or else he had not preached the gospel in its fulness to every creature. Perhaps he did not believe in the conversion of the aged, and consequently no aged persons were converted by his means. I have seen as many people converted of one age as another: that is to say, in proportion to the number of them, for there are not so many people in the world over fifty as there are under fifty; and consequently a large proportion of those persons who make up our congregations are young. We have in our regular gatherings a fair number of all ages, and as to the additions to the church, I have noticed that there is about the same proportion of very young children as of very old men and women. We have baptized, upon profession of faith, men and women over eighty years of age, about whose conversion we had as firm a conviction as we had about the conversions of the little ones; neither more nor less. Who shall dare to say that there is an age after which God's grace does not work? I challenge any one to bring a text which looks that way; furthermore, I challenge the truth of any observations which arrive at such a result. My own preaching has been such that young and old in equal proportions have attended it, and in equal proportions they have been saved. However old you may be, my Master bids me say to you, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Come along, come along, dear old friend, though you cannot come without your stick. Come along, though your eyes are failing: come in your spectacles. Though *you* cannot do much for my Master, he can do everything for you. Though you have only a little time to live on earth, you will have all eternity in heaven through which you can praise him. I am sure you will be one of the most eager at that work. I think you will be like an old woman of my acquaintance. When I spoke to her about her conversion at an advanced age, she said, "Sir, if the Lord Jesus Christ ever does save such a poor old sinner as I am, he shall never hear the last of it." That is just why I want him to save you; for then he never will hear the last of it. You will praise him for ever and for ever for what he has done for you. Will you not?

Oh, my dear hearers, come to Jesus! Come in the morning when

the dew is on your branch, for he will not cast you out. Come in the heat of noon, when the drought of care parches you, and he will not cast you out. Come when the shadows have grown long, and the darkness of the night is gathering about you, for he will not cast you out. The door is not shut; for the gate of mercy closes not so long as the gate of life is open. Oh, fly to Christ, and find mercy now!

Once again, dear friends, I want you to notice in my text *the blessed certainty of this salvation.* "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Two or three negatives in the Greek language make a negation stronger, though they would have no such effect in the English tongue. It is a very strong negative here. "Him that cometh to me I will not *not* cast out;" or, "I will never never cast out." As much as to say,—On no account, or for no reason, or on no pretence, or from no motive whatever, will I ever in time or in eternity cast out the soul that comes to me. That is how it stands—a declaration of absolute certainty from which there can be no escaping. What a blessed thing it is to get your foot on certainties! Certain preachers, who are much cried up nowadays, are very uncertain preachers, for they do not themselves know what they will be propounding to-morrow. They make their creed as they go along, and a very poor one it is when they make it. I believe in something sure and certain; namely, in infallible Scripture, and that which the Lord has written therein, never to be altered while the world stands. My text is certain as the truth of Christ Jesus; and if we had ever seen that beautiful face of his we could not distrust him. Can your imagination picture for a minute the ever-blessed face of the Son of God? Could you look into that face, and suspect him of a lie? And when he says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth in me hath everlasting life," the saying must be true. If you believe in him, you have everlasting life. When he says, "Him that cometh to me I will never never cast out," the declaration must be true. He never, never, can cast you out, whoever you may be, however long you may live, or whatever else may happen, if you do but come to him. There are plenty of reasons, apparently, why he should cast you out, but he has knocked them all on the head by saying, "I will in no wise cast out:" that is, "In no way, and under no pretext, will I ever cast out a soul that comes to me." Now, if Christ does not cast us out, then he receives us; and if he receives us, we are received into the heart of God; we are received into eternal life; and by-and-by we shall be received into everlasting blessedness. Oh, the joy of my text, in that it is so certain!

So I shall close here, dear friends, with just a word or two of further encouragement by noticing *the personality of my text;* for in this a part of the liberality consists. Do you observe that the first part of the text began with, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." Ay, but when Christ began to deal with sinners with broken hearts, he dropped the "all" and every form of general statement, and he came to the personal pronoun singular:—"*Him* that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Now, herein he meant to say to every one in this Hall, "If *thou* dost come to me, I will not cast *thee* out." It is not, "If thou and another come;" for, if so, it would be put in the plural: "If *you* come." But it is, "*Him* that cometh." You alone; your servant

alone; your child alone; but specially yourself alone: if you come to the Lord Jesus he will not cast you out. You cannot doubt this. Come, then, my dear hearers, believe your Saviour. I am not talking to-night to persons who doubt the veracity of the Son of God, I am not talking to persons who think Christ a liar. *You* know that he would receive *you* if you would come. Then, why do you not come? But you mean to come, do you, by-and-by? Then why not now? What is it that holds you back? How dare you delay? Will you be alive next week? How can you be sure of a day, or an hour? When money is to be given away, I do not find that persons generally delay to receive it, and say, "I would rather have it next year." No, they say, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Oh, to have a Christ in the hand, and to get him now! And why not *now?* Is it because you really do not understand what it is to receive him, or to believe in him? It is indeed the simplest thing in the world, and that is the only reason why it is so difficult; it is so exceedingly simple, that men cannot believe that it can be as we put it. Indeed, it is so. Faith is simply to trust Christ; and trusting Christ brings with it the new life, and salvation from sin. I sometimes put it in Watts's way—

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Christ's kind arms I fall."

But after I had once been preaching, a young man said to me, "Sir, I cannot *fall*." "Oh dear," I said, "then I do not know how to talk; for I meant not a thing you could do, but the cessation of all your efforts, just falling, or if you will see it better, just tumbling down—because you cannot stand upright; and that is it." Because I cannot save myself, I fall into Christ's arms. Ceasing to hold to anything of my own, I just drop upon him. "Still," you say, "there must be something more than that." There is nothing more than that. If thou believest that Jesus is the Christ, thou art born of God. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "He that with his heart believeth, and with his mouth maketh confession of him, shall be saved." "Oh, but I must—I must—I must do something mysterious, or feel something which at present is far beyond me." Thus you give God the lie, and put away from you the life eternal.

Have you never read the story of the good ship that had been a long time at sea, and the captain had lost his reckoning; he drifted up the mouth of the great river Amazon, and, after he had been sailing for a long time up the river without knowing that he was in a river at all, they ran short of water. When another vessel was seen, they signalled her, and when they got near enough for speaking they cried, "Water! We are dying for water!" They were greatly surprised when the answer came back, "Dip it up! Dip it up! You are in a river. It is all around you." They had nothing to do but to fling the bucket overboard, and have as much water as ever they liked. And here are poor souls crying out, "Lord, what must I do to be saved?" when the great work is done, and all that remains to them is to receive the free gift of eternal life. What must *you* do? You have done enough for one life-time, for you have undone yourself by your doing. That is not the question. It is, "Lord, what hast thou done?" And the answer is, "It is finished. I have done it all. Only come and trust me." Sinner, you are in a river

of grace and mercy. Over with the bucket, man, and drink to the full; for you will never exhaust the stream of grace.

A river is free to every dog that runs along the bank: every cow that stands by the river may drink to the full. So is the mercy of God free to every sinner, be he who he may, that does but come to Jesus. That river runs near to you to-night. Stoop down, you thirsty one, and drink and live. But you say, "I must feel different from what I do now." But you need not: come with your bad feelings. "Oh, I have not yet a broken heart," says one. Come to Christ, and he will break your heart. "But I do not feel my need as I ought." Come to Christ and he will help you to feel your need. "Oh, but I am nobody!" You are the very person that Christ delights in, for to you he will be everybody.

Do you see that beautiful tree in the orchard loaded with fruit? It is a pear-tree. From top to bottom it is covered with fruit. I think I never saw such a sight: every branch is bowing down. Some boughs are ready to break with the luscious burden. As I listen to the creaking boughs, I can hear the tree speak. What does it say? It says, "Baskets, baskets, baskets! Bring baskets!" Now, then, who has a basket? "I have got one," cries yonder friend, "but it is of no use, for there is nothing in it." Bring it here, man: that is the very kind of basket the tree wants. A person over there says, "Oh, I have a basket—a splendid basket. It is just the thing. It is full from top to bottom." You may keep your basket to yourself. It is of no use to my loaded tree. Where is there an empty basket? Who has an empty basket? Come along with you: come and pick from the tree as long as you like. Bring all your baskets. Bring thousands and thousands of baskets, all empty, and fill them all! Do you notice as we fill the baskets that the fruit begins to multiply? There is more when we have filled the baskets than there was at first, for this inexhaustible tree produces more and more fruit, as fast as we pluck from it. What is wanted by the Lord Jesus is an empty soul to receive out of the fulness which God has treasured up in him.

God bless every one of you, for his name's sake. Amen.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—It is with very sincere regret that I find myself obliged to prolong my absence. I have been exceedingly full of pain, and have been very much a prisoner to my room, or I should have returned upon the appointed day. The deacons judged it better for me to remain till I could recover, and certainly there is a far better hope for a man here in the sunshine than in a London fog. I rejoice to say that I already feel much better, and though I cannot quite maintain the erect figure which is becoming an upright man, yet the pains of lumbago are less acute than they were. I am full of confidence that I shall soon be well, in answer to your prayers.

My heart is at home. I long to be preaching Christ and winning souls. May *your* work be blessed while I am silenced. Innumerable are the forms of your holy activity, may the Holy Spirit fill them all with his power.

I send my love to all who are in Christ Jesus, and for those who are not in him—what shall I say? No blessing can come to the soul which refuses the Lord Jesus. May there be none such among us.

Wishing you a glorious Sabbath,

I am, your willing but suffering Pastor,

Menton, Jan. 17. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

KNOWLEDGE. WORSHIP. GRATITUDE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"So that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful."—Romans i. 20, 21.

THOSE who boast of their knowledge betray their ignorance. Knowledge is not a possession to be proud of, since it brings with it so great a responsibility that a nurse might as well be proud of watching over a life in peril. Knowledge may become good or ill according to the use which is made of it. If men know God, for instance, and then glorify him as God, and are thankful, their knowledge has become the means of great blessing to them; but if they know God, and fail to glorify him, their knowledge turns to their condemnation. There is a knowledge which does not puff up the mind, but builds up the soul, being joined with holy love. Did not our Lord say, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent"? But for men to know God, and not to glorify him as God, and to be unthankful, is, according to our text, no benefit to them: on the contrary, it becomes a savour of death unto them, because it leaves them without excuse. Our Saviour could plead for some, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But what plea is to be used for those who know what they do, and yet do evil; who know what they ought to do, and do it not? These have the light, and close their eyes; or, to use another figure, they have the light, and use it to sin by. They take the golden candlestick of the sanctuary into their hands, and by its help they perform their evil deeds the more dexterously, and run in the way of wickedness the more swiftly. Accursed is that man who heaps to himself knowledge till he becomes wise as Solomon, and then prostitutes it to base ends by using it to aggrandize his wealth, to pamper his appetites, to bolster his unbelief, or to conceal his vices. A man may by knowing more become all the more a devil. His growing information may only increase his condemnation. It is clear, then, that knowledge is not a possession of such unmingled good that we may grow vain of it; better far will it be if the more we know the more we watch and pray. Go on and read, young man. Go on and study with the utmost diligence. The more of knowledge you can acquire the better; but take care that you

do not, like Sardanapalus, heap up your treasures to be your own funeral pile. Do not by a rebellious pride curdle the sweet milk of knowledge, and sour your precious blessing into an awful curse. It is soon done, but not so soon undone. It was the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil the eating of which brought all this evil upon us which ye see this day. Ye may eat of that tree still, if so it please you; but if ye taste not of the tree of life at the same time, your knowledge shall only open to you the gates of hell. Knowledge of itself alone is as land which may either become a blooming garden or a howling wilderness. It is a sea out of which you shall bring pearls or dead men's bones. Life and death, heaven and hell, are here: if it was said of old, "Take heed what you hear," I also will say, "Take heed what you know."

The people mentioned by Paul in our text fell into two great evils, or rather into two forms of one great evil—atheism: the atheism of the heart, and the atheism of the life. They knew God, but they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful.

We will first consider *the first sin mentioned here*, and then *the second*. I shall not look at these two evils as if you were Romans, because I know that you are not, but I shall adapt the text to your own case, and speak of these sins, as Englishmen are too apt to commit them. Thirdly, *let us view the consequences*, or, what comes of men not glorifying God, and not being thankful. Then, fourthly, *let us fly from these sins immediately, God helping us*. O Holy Spirit, help the preacher now, for all his help is in thee!

I. At once, then, let us look at this first sin, a sin very common in these days. THEY KNEW GOD, BUT THEY GLORIFIED HIM NOT AS GOD. Even in old Rome, with all its darkness, there was some knowledge of God: how can the creature quite forget its Creator? Of course the people had not that spiritual knowledge which the Holy Ghost communicates to the renewed in heart, for the carnal mind cannot know God spiritually: its fleshly ideas cannot come near to his holy spirituality. But Paul means that they perceived the eternal power and Godhead of the Great Former of all things; and they might have perceived much more of his divine character and glory if their foolish hearts had not been darkened by their evil passions. When you go among the heathen, whether they are Pantheists or Polytheists, or whatever they may be, there is still a notion in the background of all their mythology of some one great superior being, elevated above those whom they call gods, some serenely just father, preserver, avenger, and rewarder of men. The most debased of mankind are still found to have some measure of knowledge of the great Creator: they hold the truth, though they hold it in unrighteousness. They can as soon shut their eyes to the sun, as completely blind their minds to the fact that there is a God. Some among the heathen no doubt attained to a very considerable knowledge of God, or at least they walked upon the borders of marvellous discoveries of the Godhead. We are greatly surprised at the language of Socrates, and Plato, and Seneca, and others: such men have lately been held up as patterns; but if their lives are studied, they will be found to be sadly defaced with what Paul fitly calls "vile affections." These were wise men, but the world by wisdom knew not

God; they were great thinkers, but a clear revelation of God was not in all their thoughts. They did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and so they remained steeped in loathsome vice which we dare not mention, for it is a shame even to speak of the things which were done of the most enlightened of them in secret. They had knowledge, but they forgot its responsibilities: they knew God, but they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful.

We may now let all the heathen go, for it is more true of us than it is of them, that we know God. Those to whom I am speaking to-night dwell where the name of God is familiar, where the gospel of God sounds like a trumpet in their streets, where the character of God is painted with the finger of light upon the blessed pages of the Bible, and where the Spirit of God takes care that the consciences of men shall be enlightened. We know God, but I am afraid that there are many thousands and millions of our fellow-creatures who glorify him not as God; let us see to it that we do not ourselves belong to the unhappy number.

Those do not glorify God as God *who do not trace all their good things to God.* "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," but many ungrateful hearts forget this truth, and receive the blessings of this life with dumb mouths and cold hearts. In the old time there were those who traced everything they saw to what they called "Chance"; hat misformed deity has been laid aside, and on its pedestal men have set up another idol known as "Nature." Nowadays swarms of people attribute everything that is great and wonderful to "Nature":—they talk for ever of "the beauties of Nature," "the grandeur of Nature," "the laws of Nature;" but God is as little spoken of as if he were not alive. As to laws of Nature, these occupy with moderns much the same place as the deities of Olympus with the ancients. What are laws of Nature but the ordinary ways in which God works? I know of no other definition of them. But these people attribute to them a sort of power apart from the presence of the Creator. One standing up in the street, venting his infidelity, said that we could not do better on Sunday than go abroad and worship Nature. There was nothing that was so refining and elevating to the mind as Nature. Nature did everything. A Christian man in the crowd ventured to ask, "What is Nature?" And the gentleman said, "Well, Nature—well—it is Nature. Don't you know what it is? It is Nature." No further definition was forthcoming; I fear the term is only useful as enabling men to talk of creation without being compelled to mention the Creator. I find nowadays that people talk about "Providence," and yet discard God. Among the vulgar and the ungodly this is another subterfuge to avoid the ascribing of their blessings to the Giver of them. A farmer, whose crops had failed a second time, was consoled by a clergyman, because he suffered from the hand of Providence. "Yes," said he, "that Providence is always treating me shamefully: but there's one above that will stop him." The poor soul had heard of Providence till he thought it an evil power, and hoped that the good God would curb its mischievous influence. This comes of not speaking plainly of God. For what is Providence? Can there be such a thing without the constant working of the Great Provider? Men talk of "Foresight." But is there any foresight without an eye? Is there not some living eye that is watching for our good, some living hand that

is following up the eye, and providing for our needs? Man does not like to think of his God. He wants to get away into a far country, away from God his Father; and he will adopt any sort of phrase which will help him to clear his language of all trace of God. He longs to have a convenient wall built up between himself and God. The heathen often attributed their prosperity to "fortune"; some of them talked of "chance"; others discoursed of "fate." Anything is to man's taste rather than blessing the great Father, and adoring the one God. If they prospered, they were "lucky"; this was instead of gratitude to God. They looked into the almanack to find lucky days; this instead of faith in the Most High. They were superstitious, and asked their priests to tell them what would be a fortunate time for commencing an undertaking; this instead of resting upon the goodness of the Lord. Have we not some now who bless their good luck, and still talk about their fortunate stars? God whom they know they do not honour as God.

Yes, and we have among us men who talk neither of "fortune" nor of "Nature," but of themselves. They are styled "self-made men," and they are very prone to worship the great self who made them: they are never backward in that cult. Their adoration of themselves is constant, reverent, and sincere. "Self-made men," indeed! Infinitely better is it to be a God-made man. If there be anything about us that is worth the having, it must be from him from whom every good gift and every perfect gift has evermore descended; let us therefore give *Him* thanks. There is no other sun for our sky than yon sun in the heavens: there is no other source of good but the ever-blessed God, who has made himself known to us, whom with all our hearts we now adore.

But may I not be addressing some who, at this moment, do not bow before God, and bless him for their prosperity? They attribute it to their industry, and to their good luck. Oh, sirs, you come under the head of those who know God, and yet do not glorify him as God; neither are you thankful. The Lord help such to confess this sin, and may his grace wash them clean of it, for indeed it is a great and heinous sin in the judgment of the Most High. Justice makes a black mark against those who do not ascribe their good things to God, from whom they flow with such sweet constancy of kindness.

But we can also commit that sin, in the next sense, *by not feeling any obligation laid upon us through partaking of the divine bounty.* Are there not many rich men to whom it never occurs to feel bound to serve the Lord who gave them power to get wealth? Are there not many healthy persons, sound of limb, and strong in constitution, who yet do not praise the God who has kept them from sickness and death? Are we any of us sufficiently grateful for our talents, our faculties, our friends, our daily provisions? Do we not all receive a large amount of blessing for which we do not render praise to God? The fact is that every mercy brings an obligation with it, and we that receive most ought to render most; for we receive nothing from God without being thereby naturally and of right laid under bonds to return to him the glory due unto his name. We are tenants, whose rent is to be paid in service and praise. It is a very blessed obligation! It is a happy bond to be bound to praise and bless God! Praise is no more a burden to a true heart than song to a bird, or perfume to a flower, or twinkling to a star.

Adoration is no taxation. God's revenue of glory comes from myriads of free-will offerings, which gracious spirits delight to present to him all their days. Yet there are some who know God, but they glorify him not as God: they rob him of that which it should be their life to bring. They seem to say that they are their own, and not God's: they may live as they please; they may serve themselves. God is not in all their thoughts; and, as to spending and being spent in the service of him who gave them being, it has not yet crossed their minds. God's complaint concerning them is a just one,—"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." God grant us grace to avoid this cruel provocation, and may we glorify God as God by practically owning the obligation under which his mercy places us.

Many may be met with who know God, but never glorify him as God, because *they never adore him, and worship him, with the love of their hearts.* They go to church or to some place of worship regularly, and sing psalms and hymns, and they may even have family-prayer at home; but their heart has never adored the living God with living love. Their worship has a name to live, but it is dead. They present to the Lord all the external harvest of worship, but the corn is gone, only the straw and the husk are there. And what is the value of your husky prayers? your prayers without a kernel, made up of the straw of words, and the chaff of formality? What is the value of professions of loyalty from a rebel? What is the worth of professed friendship to God when your heart is at enmity against him? Is it not a mockery of God to present to him a sacrifice "where not the heart is found"? When the Lord has to say—They come as my people, and they sit as my people, and they sing as my people, but their heart is far from me,—can he take any pleasure in them? May not God thus complain of many? Oh, let it not be so with you! I know that there are some here against whom that charge would lie if we preferred it—that they know God, but they do not glorify him as God, for they do not love him. The name and service of God are much on their tongues, but they do not delight in him, they do not hunger and thirst after him, they do not find prayer and praise to be their very element, but such service as they render is merely lip-service, the unwilling homage of bond-slaves, and not the delighted service of those who are the children of God. Oh, my brethren, if we accept Jehovah as the living God, let us give him the utmost love of our souls. Will you call a man brother, and then treat him like a dog? Dare you call God your God, and then act towards him as though he were not worthy of a thought? With what joy does David cry, "I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds"! This is the kind of spirit with which to deal with the Lord. Oh, to rejoice in God all the day, and to make him our exceeding joy! Thus, and thus only, do we glorify him as God. Without the fire of love no incense will ever rise from the censer of praise. If we do not delight in God we do not fitly adore God.

There is another way of not glorifying God as God, and that is by *never recognizing his omnipresence.* Have we not among us those who

on Sunday feel some kind of reverence of God, but during the six days of the week are godless? When they are in a place of worship they have some sense of God's being there; if they do not fear and tremble, yet they behave with decency and respect; but in other places they dare to act as if they were out of range of God. Do they fancy that God is not in that secret chamber where they follow out their passions? Do they imagine that he is not in that ribald company where they make mirth of sacred things? Do they imagine that out of man's sight is also out of God's sight? Do not some men so act and live as if God were either dead, or else were blind and deaf, utterly oblivious to everything that is done on the face of the earth? How blind must they be who think God blind! May we never fall into this absurdity! May we feel that we cannot anywhere consent to sin for God is there. The whole earth is God's house: shall we abuse the King in his own palace? The skies are the roof of his temple, and beneath God's blue sky we ought not to find a place to sin in. Nowhere in time is there space for evil, nor in the universe is there room for sin. Yet, alas, how few recognize, "Thou God seest me," as being a death-blow to sin? "They know God, but they glorify him not as God," but think that he is absent either in person or in mind, and that in some secret places they can hide away from him, and with impunity follow their own desires.

Are there not some again, and many, who do not admit the true glory of God because *the idea of his sovereignty is very horrible to them*? I lay this charge against many professing Christians—that their God is not the God of the Bible, and that they have no notion of Jehovah, the true God. The one God of heaven and earth is Jehovah—that God who said of old, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Certain professed followers of Jesus will not have this God, but they make to themselves a god who is under some degree of obligation to his sinful creatures, of whom they say that he is bound to treat all alike. These are guilty of robbing Divinity of its most majestic attribute, namely, sovereignty. They are for dictating to the King of kings, and tying the hands of infinite compassion, lest the supreme will of God should have too much liberty. I know of no such God as that: the God I worship can never do other than right, yet is he under no bond to his creatures, but ordereth all things according to the counsel of his own will. I believe that if the Lord had denied me mercy, I had so sinned that I could never have impugned his justice. When I see him save a sinner, I look not at it as a deed which he was bound to do, but as a spontaneous act, free as the air, full of his own goodness which arises entirely from himself. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." I, for one, am perfectly satisfied with everything that God does, whether of power, justice, or mercy. My heart says, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." I could have sung the song of Moses at the Red Sea, when all Egypt was drowned, and found in the drowning of the foe a deep background of joy, because I should have seen in it the carrying out of the divine will, the reign of righteousness, and the avenging of cruel tyranny. I make bold to say that I would have praised God as the waves went over Pharaoh; for the Lord did it, and he did right. I would have cried with Moses, "I

will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." I expect to be among the number, though some seem as if they would decline the service, who shall for ever bless God for all his dealings with mankind—the stern as well as those that seem more tender. The Lord God, even Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, is the God whom I worship. I do not know this new god that has lately come up, who they say is all tenderness and has none of the stern attributes of righteousness and wrath. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and in him my soul delights. Let him sway his sceptre even as he pleases. His will be done on earth even as it is in heaven. Again will we say Hallelujah, when all his everlasting purposes shall have been fulfilled, and the wicked shall be punished, and the righteous raised to their Father's throne. To know God, and to glorify him as God, is to regard him as supreme, ungoverned, the Arbiter of all things, whose will is law. I believe in God on his throne, God giving no account of his matters, but doing his own pleasure as God over all. Short of this I could not glorify him as God.

There are some others who know God, who fail to glorify him as God, because *they do not trust him.* In revelation God has presented himself as the object of trust to his creatures, and he has promised that all who trust in him shall be forgiven their transgressions through the atonement of his Son, Jesus Christ. Such as trust him he declares shall be saved; and he sends out a messenger of mercy to all mankind, proclaiming—"He that believeth in him is not condemned." He bids sinners come and trust under the shadow of his wing; and he declares that none that come to him will be ever cast out. Revealing himself in Christ Jesus, he pleads with guilty men. Asking nothing of them, he entreats them to accept his mercy, which he freely presents to them without money and without price. Making no distinction in the gospel-call, he bids men come to him, saying, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth; for I am God, and besides me there is none else." When proud man replies, "No, I shall trust in myself, trust in my own works, trust in my own prayers, but I shall not trust in Christ," then he knows God, but he glorifies him not as God, and when he perishes he will be without excuse. What kind of God is that whom we will not trust? How do we honour him when we refuse to believe him? Do we accept his Godhead, and yet refuse his mercy? This cannot be.

The counts are many against men, but this one more must be mentioned—many know God, but they never glorify him as God *by submitting themselves to him, and yielding up their members to be instruments of his glory.* If I glorify God as God, then I desire to obey God's commandments, to spread his glory, to magnify his name. I desire in all things to please him, if indeed I treat him as God should be treated. If I know God, and yet live for my own profit, for my own honour, for my own comfort, then I do not glorify God as God. Oh, sirs, when the Lord is glorified as God, we yield ourselves to his control without a murmur. He may take what he will away from us, and we say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." He may remove every comfort from us, and cover us with sore boils and blains, but we shall sit down with Job upon the dunghill, and say, "The Lord gave, and the

Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Knowing him as God will make us submissive to suffer, and quick to act. We shall feel the force of Elijah's cry, "If the Lord be God, follow him." We shall rouse ourselves to the utmost energy to serve him when he stands before us as really God. If we serve man and are faithful, we do the best we can for our master; but if God be our Master, oh, what service we are bound to render to him! What enthusiasm ought to be kindled in our breasts by the belief that we are God's servants! "I am thy servant," is our happy claim, our honoured challenge. This it is that makes a man of a man, and something more than man. Oh, to learn this lesson, and to practise it! To glorify God as God will make us akin to angels! Even you Christians may feel that this is much beyond you yet, but towards it you must ever fly. I shrink before my Lord in speaking of him, but I desire what I have not yet attained—that I may truly glorify him as my Lord and my God.

II. Now we come to consider the second sin. May the word which I may have to say about it, be blessed to many of my hearers by the power of the Holy Spirit! The second sin is "NEITHER WERE THANKFUL." Did you know, dear friends, that unthankfulness was such a sin as this? Have you ever thought of it in this light before—that men were without excuse because when they knew God they were not thankful? Unthankfulness is a sin for which there is no excuse if it be attended with knowledge. I fear there are thousands who *call* themselves Christians, who are not thankful, and yet they never thought themselves very guilty on that account. Yet you see these sinners were without excuse, because they were guilty of a great sin before God, and that sin was unthankfulness. I tremble both for myself and you when I see want of thankfulness thus set in the front rank of sins.

How is it that we may be unthankful?

I answer, first, *there is in some a want of gratitude for mercies possessed.* They receive many blessings without making a note of them, or even seeming to know that they have them. Their daily mercies seem to come in always at the back door, where the servants take them in, and never tell their master or mistress that they have arrived. They never receive their mercies at the front door with grateful acknowledgments; but they still continue dumb debtors, daily owing more, but making no attempt at a return. The Lord continues to bless them in things temporal, to keep them in health and strength, ay, and to give them the means of grace and spiritual opportunities; and they live as if these things were so commonplace that they were not worth thanking God for. Many professors are of that kind—recipients of countless mercies, but destitute of such common thankfulness as even beasts might manifest. From them God hears no song of gratitude, no chirp of praise, though birds would charm the woodlands with their minstrelsy: these are worse than the dumb driven cattle, or the fishes in the brook, which do at least leap up, and mean their Maker's praise.

Some show this unthankfulness in another way, for *they always dwell most on what they have not got.* They have manna, and that is angels' food; but then they have no fish, and this is a ready theme for grumbling. They talk very loudly of "the fish we did eat in Egypt," and lament those ample feasts provided by the muddy Nile. Moreover, they have

none of those delightful vegetables—the leeks, and the garlic, and the onions. They have none of these rank luxuries, and therefore again they murmur, and call the manna "light bread." They put this complaint over and over again to Moses, till Moses must have been sick of them and their garlic. They said that they could not get leeks, and cucumbers, and onions, and that they were therefore most hardly done by, and would not much longer put up with it. Thankless rebels! And have I not known some of God's servants say that they enjoy much of the presence of their Lord, but they have no riches; and so they are not among the favoured ones. Over their poverty they fetch a deep groan. Some live in the presence of God, so they tell us, and they are full of divine delights, but yet they are greatly afflicted with aches and pains, and all the dolors of rheumatism, and therefore they murmur. I admit that rheumatism is a dreadful pain enough, but at the same time to dwell always on the dark side of things, and to forget our mercies, is a sad instance of ingratitude. We are few of us as thankful as we ought to be; and there are some people who are not thankful at all, for instead of a song concerning their mercies, their life is one long dirge for their miseries. Must we always hear the sackbut? Is the harp never to give forth a joy-note?

Some show their unthankfulness by *fretting under their supposed ills.* They know from Scripture that even their afflictions are working for their good, yet they do not rejoice in the prospect, or feel any gratitude for the refining process through which the Lord is passing them. Heaven and perfection are left unsung, but the present processes are groaned over without ceasing. Their monotonous note is always this pain, this loss, this burden, this uncomfortable sensation, this persecution from the world, this unkindness from the saints, and so on; all this goes to show that, though they know God, they do not glorify him as God, neither are they thankful.

We can be guilty of unthankfulness, also, by *never testifying to the goodness of God.* A great many people come in and out of your houses; do you ever tell them about God's goodness to you? Did you ever take up a single ten minutes with the tale of the Lord's lovingkindness to you? Oh, what backwardness there is to testify to God as God, and to all his goodness and love! Our mouths are full of anything rather than the goodness of the Lord. Shame on our wicked lips!

Some fail, also, in their *singing of God's praises.* I love to be singing in my heart, if I may not sing with my tongue. Is it not a good thing for you house-wives, when you are about the house, to sing over everything? I remember a servant that used to sing at the washtub, and sing in the kitchen; and when some one asked her why she was always singing, she said that if it did not do anything else it kept bad thoughts out of her mind. There is a great deal in that; for bad thoughts are bad tenants, who pay no rent and foul the house. I knew a dear old Methodist preacher, who is now in heaven, who when he came downstairs of a morning was always tooting a bit of a hymn over, and he did the same in the barn, and the field. I have passed him in the street, and noted his happy melody: indeed he was always singing. He never took much notice of anybody, so as to be afraid of being overheard. Whether people heard him or not did not make much difference to him.

He was singing to the Lord, not to them; and so he went on singing. I do not think that he had much of a voice, or an ear for music, but his soul was made up of praise, and that is better than a musical education. God does not criticize our voice, but he accepts our heart. Oh, to be singing the praises of God every minute of our lives, and never ceasing therefrom! Do you not think that many fail in this respect? They are not preparing for heaven, where all is praise, or they would take up the joyful employment at once.

It is plain that many are not thankful to God, for they *never praise him with their substance.* Yet when the Jew was thankful, he took care to give a portion to the house of the Lord: before he would eat of his corn, he would send his sheaf to the sanctuary. If we are grateful to God, we shall feel that the first thing to do is to give of our substance an offering of thanksgiving to the Most High. But this does not strike some people, whose religion is so spiritual that they cannot endure to hear of money, and they faint at the sound of a collection. Their thankfulness rises to singing a hymn occasionally, but it never goes as far as giving a button to the cause of God. I am afraid their thankfulness is not worth more than what they pay to express it: that is to say, nothing at all. God deliver us from such a state of heart as that; and may we never, in any of these senses, be found amongst those professors, of whom it is said that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful.

III. Listen to me now carefully for two or three minutes while, in the third place, I mention, very briefly and solemnly, what was THE RESULT OF THIS.

They knew God, but they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful. And the first result of it was that *they fell into vain imaginings.* If we do not glorify God, the true God, we shall soon be found setting up another god. This vain-imagination business is being done quite as extensively now as in Paul's days. Depart from the inspiration of the Bible, and from the infallibility of the Spirit of God who wrote it, and where will you go? Well, I cannot tell where you will go. One wanders into one vain imagination, and one into another, till the dreamers are on all sides. I expect to see a new doctrine every day of the week now. Our thinkers have introduced an age of inventions, wherein everything is thought of but the truth of God. We do not want these novelties. We are satisfied with the word of God as we find it. But if you do not glorify God as God, and are not thankful to him for all his teaching, then away you go into vain imaginations.

And what next? Well, *away goes the mind of man into all sorts of sins.* The chapter describes unnatural lusts and horribly fierce passions. Men that are not satisfied and thankful—men that have no fear of God before their eyes—it were a shame for us to think, much more to speak, of what they will do. A heart that cannot feed at God's table will riot somewhere. He that is not satisfied with the cup that God has filled will soon be a partaker of the cup of devils. An unthankful spirit is, at bottom, an atheistic spirit. If God were God to us, we should not be unthankful to him. If God were glorified in our hearts, and we were thankful for everything that he did, we should walk in holiness, and live in submission. And if we do not thus behave ourselves, the tendency will be for us to

go from bad to worse, and from worse to the very worst. This has been done on a large scale by nations, whose downward course of crime began with want of thankfulness to God. It is done on a smaller scale by individuals, to whom departure from God is the beginning of a vicious career. Get away from God, and where have you gone? If you do not love him, and delight in him, whither will you stray? May the Lord tether us fast to himself, and even nail us to the cross.

It seems that these people, of whom Paul wrote, fell into all kinds of bitterness, such as envy, murder, deceit, malignity, whispering, backbiting, hating of God. They became spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, and so forth. Well, if your spirit is not sweetened by the adoration and the love of God, it will grow bitter. If love does not reign, hate will rule. Look at unthankful people. Hear them talk. Nobody's character is safe. There is no neighbour whom they will not slander. There is no Christian man whom they will not misrepresent. The very angels of God would not be safe from suspicion if they lived near to people of that kind. But when you glorify God as God, and are thankful for everything—when you can take up a bit of bread and a cup of cold water, and say with the poor Puritan, "What, all this, and Christ too?"—then are you happy, and you make others happy. A godly preacher, finding that all that there was for dinner was a potato and a herring, thanked God that he had ransacked sea and land to find food for his children. Such a sweet spirit breeds love to everybody, and makes a man go through the world cheerfully. If you give way to the other order of feeling, and do not glorify God, but quarrel with him, and have no thankfulness for his mercies, then you will suck in the spirit of the devil, and you will get into Satan's mind, and be of his temper, and by-and-by his works you will do. Oh, brothers and sisters, dread unthankfulness! Perhaps you did not think that it was so bad, but it is horrible! God help you to escape from it!

IV. And that you may escape from it, let us finish up by this exhortation. LET US FLY BY THE HELP OF GOD'S SPIRIT FROM THESE TWO SINS. *Let us glorify God, as God,* every one of us.

"Oh," says one, "I am full of sin." Come and glorify God, then, by confessing it to him. "Oh, but I am not pardoned." Come and glorify him by accepting pardon through the blood of his dear Son. "Oh, but I am of an evil heart." Come and glorify him by telling him so, and asking his Spirit to renew you in your mind. Come, yield yourself to his sweet gospel. May his blessed Spirit incline you so to do. Come, take him now to be your God. Have you forgotten him? Remember him. Have you neglected him? Seek him. Have you offended him? Mourn before him. Say, "I will arise, and go unto my Father." Your Father waits to receive you. Glorify him as God.

And then, next, let us begin to *be very thankful,* if we have not been so before. Let us praise God for common mercies, for they prove to be uncommonly precious when they are once taken away. Bless God that you were able to walk here, and are able to walk home again. Bless God for your reason: bless him for your existence. Bless God for the means of grace, for an open Bible, for the throne of grace, for the preaching of the Word. You that are saved must lead the song. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within

me, bless his holy name." Bless him for his Son. Bless him for his Spirit. Bless him for his Fatherhood. Bless him that you are his child. Bless him for what you have received. Bless him for what he has promised to give. Bless him for the past, the present, and the future. Bless him in every way, for everything, at all times, and in all places. Let all that is within you bless his holy name. Go your way rejoicing. May his Spirit help you so to do!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans i. 1—22.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE ROCKY FORTRESS AND ITS INHABITANT.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 3RD, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure."—Isaiah xxxiii. 15, 16.

THERE were terrible times in Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. The Assyrian power was exceedingly formidable, and it was ferocious to the last degree. Woe to the unhappy land which fell under the power of this spoiler. Assyria knew not the meaning of "mercy;" it came down "like a wolf on the fold," rending and devouring without pity. The armies of Sennacherib were ravaging the kingdom of Judah, and they had brought it into such a state that the prophet cried, "The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits." Before the invaders the land was a garden, and behind them it was a desolate wilderness. Yet the Lord had given a promise to his people in Jerusalem on this wise: "Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord." Notwithstanding Rabshakeh's blasphemous letter, and all his foul revilings, those who trusted in Jehovah were not dismayed; for the Lord had promised to defend the city for his own name's sake.

There were godly men in the city, I fear they were not many, who rested content with the sure promise of God, and went about their daily business feeling perfectly safe. They would have felt secure if the whole land had swarmed with Assyrians as the fields with locusts, for they believed the word of the Lord. Their trust was in the living God, and therefore they feared not the multitude of the enemy. But the whole of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were not of this brave order: the unholy were afraid, fearfulness surprised the hypocrites. Their sin and their deceit made cowards of them. They would all be destroyed, they would all perish by the Assyrians! Who was to save them? What

power could resist the conqueror of nations? Where were the gods of Hamath and Arphad? The people of those cities had trusted in their gods, and yet none of them had been delivered out of the hand of the invader: how could Jehovah turn back the fierce tyrant now that he had come upon the land like a flood?

The sinners and the hypocrites in the time of trial were discovered: the sinners showed their fear, and the hypocrites manifested their unbelief. They began to flee before they were pursued: they trembled though no foeman could be seen from the walls. God in vengeance was come near to the city, the land smoked with all-consuming fire, the flame of the Lord's indignation burned perpetually—how could these men hope to live in such times? As well hope to live amid devouring fires and everlasting burnings. Alas, there are many who dwell among God's people at this day, and have a name and a place among them who are sinners and not saints, hypocrites and not believers; and these will before long be discovered and dismayed. While all goes well with the church of God you cannot separate the vile from the precious, nor pluck up the tares from among the wheat, nor cast out the bad fish from among the good, which are enclosed in the same net. But trying times come, and days of adversity, and then the false brethren are discerned. When persecution arises the hypocrites are offended, when affliction rushes like a torrent the sand-founded houses fall; and especially shall it be so when amid the terrors of the last tremendous day every secret thing shall be revealed, and hypocrites and sinners shall appear in their true colours. Fearfulness will leap unexpectedly upon the hypocrites to their intense surprise, for they will see how impossible it is for them to dwell with God and to abide his holy presence. Oh, dear brethren, let us not be satisfied with being in Zion, or in the church; let us not rest till we are quite sure that we are not sinners in it, that we are not hypocrites in it: for, mark you, if our religion is not sanctifying and true it will fail us in the hour of trial. If our confidence in God does not make us calm and hopeful in the time of temptation and sorrow, what is the use of it? Yet it is certain that no man shall find his profession to be of use to him in testing times but he that is true in it, he that is thorough in it, he that is neither a sinner nor a hypocrite in the sense in which those words are here used. Safety in Zion belongs to those born in her by regeneration, reared in her by sanctification, enfranchised in her by faith in the Son of God, settled in her by fixed principles, confirmed in her by obedience to her laws, and bound to her by intense love of her king and her citizens. Such "shall dwell on high" secure from danger, and only such: the aliens and foreigners within her gates shall ere long be driven forth with shame.

We are going to look this morning at these favoured people: first, to *note their character;* secondly, to *observe their security;* and to finish, thirdly, by stirring up all present to *seek their felicity.* Oh, for the aid of the Holy Spirit all the sermon through!

I. First, let us NOTE THEIR CHARACTER.

They are described in part in the words of our text, but I am obliged to go a little further afield for one essential part of their character. The true people of God who in the time of danger will be preserved are a people *who display a humble, patient, present faith in God.* They

reveal their character in the second verse of the chapter before us when they pray—"O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble." They humbly cry, "O Lord, be gracious unto us." They are a praying people, who make their appeal to God under a sense of need: they are not fatalists for they pray, neither are they self-sufficient for they seek help of God. They beseech the Lord to bless them not according to their own merit, but according to his grace. Though their outward life has been cleansed, and their hearts are renewed, yet they do not imagine that they have any claim upon God, but their appeal is to his free favour: "O Lord, be gracious unto us." They are not a people who think that God will be gracious necessarily, and that, therefore, they need not pray for mercy, for they are found crying to him in earnest prayer. They are, you see, a trustful people, who feel that they have need, and that their need can only be fulfilled by the sovereign grace of God, to whom they make supplication. Those who dwell on high with God are always lovers of grace: it is the top and bottom of their hope.

Furthermore, they are a waiting people: "We have waited for thee." If the Lord does not seem to hear their prayer at once, they nevertheless expect that he will do so; and, therefore, they wait expectantly. If at once they have not all the comfort and joy they would desire, they tarry God's pleasure, not rushing into sin to snatch a hasty rescue, nor running away at the first rebuff and saying, "What profit is there if we wait upon him?" Quite certain that the Lord does hear prayer, and that he waiteth to be gracious, they hopefully abide his time, for his appointments are ever wise.

They are a people who have a present faith, which they exercise every day, saying, "Be thou their arm every morning!" They do not imagine that by having trusted in God years ago they have obtained salvation, and therefore may now live without faith; but they believe to-day as they believed from the beginning of their Christian life, and so prove it true that "the just shall live by his faith." Every step they are depending, every morning they are looking up to the hills whence cometh their help. These are the true people of God, and the only people of God:—trusting, hoping, expecting, relying and resting upon the Lord their God. The fear of the Lord is their treasure, and they cry with exultation in the language of the twenty-second verse, "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us." The description in our actual text is the portrait of their outer life; but a living faith is the secret basis and foundation of it all.

This being understood, our text gives a description of these people, setting out their various features. It first describes *their feet*, or how they walk: "He that walketh righteously." Faith has an effect upon our entire manhood. When a man believes, his faith affects every part of him; it operates upon his actions, thoughts, wishes, and designs; and it affects both his private and public life. One of the first evidences of a true belief in God is that a man walks righteously. He tries to act rightly towards his God and towards his fellow-men; and thus he is led to be devout before the Lord, and upright among men. The rule of right is the rule for him; not policy, nor the hope of gain, nor the desire to please, much less the lust of the

flesh and the pride of life. By the grace of God he labours above all things to walk in the narrow way of true holiness. I want you to notice this, because the promise I am going to speak about belongs only to the people who answer to this description; therefore, see you to it, that you do not take the comfort of the promise if you come not under the character to whom that comfort is given. The man who does not walk righteously shall not dwell on high; there shall be no place of defence for him. If we depart from the ways of righteousness, and run in the paths of the wicked, we shall meet with the same fate as they. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Where the grace of God truly dwells, and a living faith is in exercise, the man becomes righteous in his walk and conversation; and his course is more and more conformed to the will of the Lord. I deny that a man is a believer in the Lord Jesus if he remains a dishonest man; I deny that he has real faith in Jesus Christ if he is rotten in heart, unjust in business, and untrue in life. He knows not Christ who delights in iniquity. So you see that the first description of this blessed man who is to dwell on high is very searching, for it does not relate to his profession, but to his walk and conversation from day to day. It is not talk, but action that we have here. Here is no room for the fiction of formality, all is fact, fact of daily life.

The next feature that is described is *his tongue*—"he speaketh uprightly." No description of a man's character can be perfect which does not include his speech. A man who lies, or who talks obscenely or profanely, is a bad man! A man whose words are arrogant and boastful, cruel and slanderous, unreliable and deceptive, unchaste and impure, is no child of God. The grace of God very speedily sweetens a man's tongue, and if his religion does not operate upon his speech, surely it is not the religion of the pure and holy God. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." If the tongue be set on fire of hell the heart is not on fire with grace from heaven. The doctor says, "Put out your tongue," and he judges the symptoms of health or disease thereby; assuredly, there is no better test of the inward character than the condition of the tongue. "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee" is a fair decision. If, then, our lips do not speak uprightly, that is, speak truthfully and justly, if our tongue is not salted and sanctified by the grace of God, then we cannot claim any of the privileges which are described in our text. God grant that we may prove by our conversation that the Lord has renewed us in our inner man.

The next feature is *the heart*—"he that despiseth the gain of oppressions." Not only does he not oppress any man, nor wish to gain anything by extortion or by grinding the faces of the poor, or by any act of unrighteousness; but he thinks such gain as might be made in that fashion to be utterly contemptible—he despises it. He desires gain if it may come cleanly to him; prosperity is as welcome to him as to another man, for he has his own needs and the needs of his household for which he is bound to provide; but if any should say to him that there is gold to be gotten through pinching the labourer in his wages, or through grasping by law that which is not morally his own, he

abhors the thought. He says of such gain, "I would not win it if I could; I would not put such evil money amongst my honest earnings; it would pollute all the rest of my substance." A good man is jealous lest he should seem to receive the wages of unrighteousness. He desires to receive his goods as blessings at the hands of God, and not to win them as a spoil from the oppressed. A true Christian would not bring into his house a thing over which he could not seek the blessing of God: he would count it a thing accursed like Achan's wedge of gold. Many ways of making money which are tolerated nowadays would be loathsome to a right-minded man. Though unrighteous practices should promise to fill his house with silver and gold, he would not follow them; he could not sell his Lord for pieces of silver. He despises the gain of oppression; it is as the mire of the streets to him; he looks down upon it with utter contempt. Dear friends, it little matters what our outward life may be, or even what our speech may be, if our heart is not affected by our religion. If grace only lies skin-deep in thee, it has only saved thy skin, but not thy soul. Until grace touches the mainspring, it has done nothing to purpose: the heart must despise evil, as well as the lips denounce it. Until the well-head is sweetened, the streams are foul. Not only must I do right, but love right; not only must I avoid wrong, but I must hate wrong; not only must I refuse unrighteous gain, but I must utterly despise it. See, my brethren, how much is needful ere any one of us can claim the choice blessings which are spread before us in the second part of our text.

The portrait does not omit *the hands*, those important members of the body—those prominent actors both for good and for evil. In Isaiah's days bribery was connected with every government office high and low; but the good man "shaketh his hands from holding of bribes." If money was slipped into his hand before he was aware of it, he shook it off with indignation. He would not take what was offered or keep what was given. There is much of bribery abroad still; in indirect ways men are offered advantages if they will wink at evil, or frown on good. Satan tempts young and old with the old insinuation, "All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." The Destroyer still makes merchandise of souls. Oh, for grace to shake off every sort of bribe from our hands as men shake off dust from their feet with utter abhorrence when their indignation is aroused. Clean hands are as needful as renewed hearts. If your hands clutch the reward of a sinful trade, or a dishonest transaction, or if you hold a profit by countenancing wrong, or forbearing from right, you are not among the people whom the Lord has sworn to guard with his own right hand.

Thus we have described the feet, the tongue, the heart, and the hand. Now comes *the ear*,—"that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood." Men who delighted in war in olden time were apt to regale one another with their cruel deeds,—whom they slew, and how they slew them: they rolled the dainty morsels of cruelty under their tongues. In Hezekiah's times, I warrant, tales were told blood-red with horror that would have made our ears to tingle, and these were greedily listened to by those of a coarse spirit; but the good man in Jerusalem would not hear them. When a man boasted of having slain such an enemy the godly man said, "Go, tell your tale somewhere else, lest I bring you before the

judge. I will not hear of your wicked doings; I cannot endure your brutal talk." He shut his ears, he drew back from the discourse, it was sickening to him. Now it is not the hearing of blood alone that you and I must avoid, but the hearing of anything that is tainted, prurient, sceptical, depraving. This has much to do with the health of a genuine Christian's soul—that he puts an embargo upon unclean conversation, counts it contraband, and will not allow it to enter his soul by the gate of the ear. He wisely shuts the gate, lets down the portcullis, and pulls up the drawbridge, so that no filthy communication may come in by Ear-gate. The same sacred prudence prevents our reading books which are corrupt, or false. As soon as we reach a page which has an ill savour about it, we drop the volume and return it to its owner; or if it is our own we cast it into the fire that it may do no harm to others. The righteous man "shutteth his ear." He will not be interested in that which cannot subserve his highest interest. He is not willing to be like the king in the story, poisoned through the ear. He knows that an ill tale cannot injure him if he never hears it, and therefore he denies his curiosity that he may preserve his memory undefiled. He is deaf to news about which a good man would be dumb. He has the blood upon his ear, to signify that his Lord has bought him with a price in that member, as well as in every other; yea, his ear is bored to the doorpost of truth, that he may hear it, and it only, with full intent of heart.

The picture is complete when *the eyes* are mentioned—"he shutteth his eyes from seeing evil." He cannot help seeing it as he goes along his pilgrimage through life; but he seeks not such a sight, and as much as he can he avoids it. He takes no pleasure in the most brilliant displays of folly. Vain pomps and glories charm him not. He does not seek his amusement in gazing upon bedizened wickedness. If there be a turmoil in the street he is not the man that will be called as a witness to it, for he discreetly walks the other way, leaving off strife before it be meddled with. He is one that does not leap into the ditch in the hope that he may come out of it without being covered with mire; but he chooses the clean path, and keeps out of harm's way. When others crave to see life, he judges such life to be death, and pursues a nobler path. He wishes to see only that which is good, and true, and helpful to his progress to heaven. Opened eyes and ears are good, but sometimes closed eyes and stopped ears are better. You know the old classic story of how Ulysses caused his sailors to pass the rocks of the Sirens in safety. The sweet enchanting song of the fatal sisters would have fascinated the mariners, and drawn them upon the rocks, and so the crafty Ulysses sealed the ears of all his mariners with wax, lest the sweet deluders should destroy them.

> "Then every ear I barr'd against the strain,
> And from access of frenzy lock'd the brain."

To be blind and deaf and dumb in some places would be far better than to hear and see and speak to our own condemnation: better infinitely to enter into life halt or blind or deaf, than, having all our powers, to use them to sinful purposes, and fall into hell fire at last.

Shortly, the text means just this, that a true believer is a man who has himself well in hand, having mastery over his whole manhood. He

has a bit in the mouth of all the steeds which draw the chariot of life, and he holds them under due control. He will not let his ear or his eye delude his fancy, nor his foot or hand deface his conduct, nor his heart or tongue betray his spirit: he will have nought to do with evil, he has no fellowship with it, his spirit is redeemed, regenerated, renewed. He will not be flattered into pride, nor bribed into deceit, nor allured into unholiness. The Holy Spirit has wrought in him a holy spirit, and integrity and uprightness preserve him.

The true Christian is a man who keeps himself clear of the common sins of the age, the popular vices which flourish uncondemned. The sins mentioned in the text were those current in Jerusalem: there they oppressed the poor, they ground them down in their rents, in their wages, in the price of food, in the usury demanded for loans; there they took bribes, and sold justice; but the good man did not so because of the fear of the Lord. In Jerusalem men-at-arms gained wealth by deeds of blood and violence; they devoured widows' houses, and ate up the inheritances of the fatherless: but so did not the child of God. He was out of the fashion. Gainful sins were to him most accursed: he would rather suffer wrong than inflict it. David sketched this man in his twenty-fourth Psalm, and with this I give a finishing stroke to the portrait:—"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

II. We have reached our second head. I ask you to follow me while, concerning these godly men, we OBSERVE THEIR SECURITY.

Observe it, first, *as it is pictorially described* in the text. The times are those of war: the battle rages in the plain, but "he shall dwell on high"; aloft upon the craggy rocks shall be his citadel. In times of invasion men resorted to the highest mountains and rocks, that there they might be sheltered among the lofty fastnesses. While others flee, this man shall dwell—dwell at ease, in permanent peace; and that dwelling shall be on the heights, far beyond the reach of the invader. Is not this glorious? The bands of robbers ravage all around, but they cannot plunder *him;* he looks down upon them and defies their power. There upon the inaccessible rock stands the city of peace, its quiet walls gleaming in the sunlight, and flashing back a calm defiance to the foe. "Mark ye well her bulwarks." A believer dwells on the heights, his life is hid with Christ in God, he cannot be reached by the darts of the adversary.

"Yet," saith one, "though he dwell on high, the enemy may reach him by scaling-ladders, or by some other means of assault." By no means shall they smite him, for he shall have a "place of defence." Is it not written, "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge"? "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." As a castle prepared for war, as "the tower of David builded for an armoury," so shall the Lord be unto his people. The adversary shall rage in vain, dashing himself against ramparts which he cannot shake; he shall go round the city like a dog, but find no entrance, for the Lord is there.

"Yet," crieth one, "these walls may be dashed down, or may fall into decay." Not so, for "his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks." Stupendous rock, firm, massive, enormous, shall furnish him a hiding-place. Immutable strength shall gird him around both by day and by night for ever and ever. "His place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks." Not one fortification, but many shall make up his stronghold: mountains shall be round about him, the solid foundations of the earth shall stand between him and the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt him.

"Munitions of stupendous rock
His dwelling-place shall be,
There might his soul without a shock
The wreck of nature see."

"Yet," saith one, "the enemy may starve a man out of his citadel: rock cities have been captured at last because the inhabitants have been pinched with hunger." There has been nothing for the men-at-arms to eat, and therefore they have sold their castle for bread. But this also is provided for: "His bread shall be given him." God will take care that the godly shall not want. As the Lord's chosen cannot be driven out, so they shall not be starved out. The believer shall hold the fort till Christ shall come, for the bread of angels shall be rained upon him sooner than he shall lack.

"Ah, well," saith one, "but even if bread could be conveyed into the fortress, yet you know these elevated positions cannot be readily supplied with water, and by thirst they may be forced to yield." The promise has thought of that also, for it is written, "his waters shall be sure." The well within the gate shall never fail, the hidden springs shall never be dried, and the people of the city shall drink and drink as much as they will, and yet the supply shall never be exhausted. O thou enemy, let thy hopeless warfare end! Give up the conflict, for vainly dost thou beleaguer the city of God! The chosen of the Lord shall never be conquered by the foe, for his God hath taken measures to garrison him against all assaults and to deliver him in all straits.

Do you remind me that all this is poetry? I answer, It is a poetical description, but it is true in every jot and tittle, and so I ask you to accompany me while we consider this thing *as it may be actually experienced.*

It is a matter of fact that the man who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, and lives as a Christian should live, dwells on the heights. His mind is lifted up above the common cares, and worries, and vexations of life. The Holy Spirit has begotten him again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and therefore his conversation is in heaven, from whence he looks for his Saviour the Lord Jesus I am sure that many of you know what it is to ride on the high places of the earth, and to look down upon the world as a poor, paltry thing. You have walked with God in light, even as he is in the light, and then you have been filled with a joy which no man taketh from you, and you have trodden the world beneath your feet, and all that earth calls good or great. Thus has it been true of you, "he shall dwell on high."

You have also found that you have had a place of defence in time of trouble. Though often assailed you have never been really injured: unto

this day the rage of man has caused you no real loss. You can understand to-day the meaning of that word, "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" Even Satan himself has not been able to overthrow you: you have trodden upon the lion and the dragon: in the name of the Lord you have resisted the devil, and he has fled from you. Tell it out this day to all the sons of men, that the Lord thy God has been a wall of fire round about thee. I also will join thee in this glorying. "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength!" All things have worked together for good to us up till now, and we know it; we have had a place of defence, and in this we will rejoice to be glad.

And do you not know to-day how secure, how immutable is your defence? Even as the eagle on the rock cannot be reached by the fowler, so are you secure. Look! You have God's promise—"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee!" "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." These promises are the munitions of rocks behind which you are sheltered; the sure words of an unchanging God are your bulwarks. You have also the oath of God as your high tower: for he has sworn by himself because he could swear by no greater. There stands his covenant made up of promises, secured by oath, and ratified by blood: who shall break within that line of defence? What munitions of rock can be compared with these things in which it is "impossible for God to lie,"—these pledges which God can never dishonour, these guarantees of everlasting faithfulness that can never be questioned. Oh, the blessed security of a child of God!

At this present moment, O child of God, you are dwelling where you must be safe; for, first, you were chosen before the foundation of the world, and God will not lose his choice, nor shall his decree be frustrated. Next, you have been bought with the precious blood of the Son of God himself, and he will never lose what he has so dearly bought. You have been quickened by the Holy Ghost, and such a life can never die. You know who hath said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." You have been taken into the family of God, and made his child; and will your Father now disown you, or remove your name out of the family register? You are also joined unto Christ in one spirit, you are a "member of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones," and shall Christ be dismembered, and the Son of God be rent in twain? Believing in my Lord this morning I stand where the devils of hell cannot reach me, and where the angels of God might envy me; for I can exclaim in your name and in my own, "Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" We challenge earth and hell, time and eternity, to dissolve the blessed union between Christ and his people. Who is he that can harm you if you be followers of that which is good? If your confidence be in the living God, who shall put you to shame?

I must not fail to notice that the poetic utterance, "Thy bread shall be given thee," is also literally true. It has been true to you, my brethren, concerning your daily bread. That word is true, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." At times there has been little on the table, but all-sufficiency has still filled the storehouse. When God multiplied the oil

and the meal of the poor woman at Zarepta, I do not believe that at any one moment she ever had more than sufficed for a single meal: every day that Elijah lived with her she had to scrape the bottom of the barrel, for she had never more than a handful of meal and a little oil. We are not told that either the barrel or the cruse were filled up; but we read—"the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail." You may frequently reach the end of your provision, but you can never exhaust your Provider. The meal may come by handfuls, and the oil may only drip out drop by drop, but what matters? Was not the manna from heaven a small round thing, and did it not fall morning by morning? If you have earthly provision as you want it, should it not suffice you? If you get as much as you need at this meal, and as much as you want for the next meal, is it not well? Are not the loaves of heavenly bread all the better for being fresh and fresh? The manna would not keep, but bred worms; who wants such unsavoury store? There is nothing like living from hand to mouth when it is from God's hand to faith's mouth. Daily bread promotes daily gratitude, and from God's hand hourly providence brings multiplied love-tokens, and is a surer sign of remembrance than if we could have life's mercies all in a lump. "His bread shall be given him" refers also to heavenly bread, which we have even more cause to think about than about the bread which perisheth: this also shall be given us. If we be driven away from a faithful ministry, if we remove to the utmost ends of the earth where we miss the means of grace, yet the Lord will feed our souls. If his ministers do not feed us, he will himself minister to us. The word of the Lord shall not cease to nourish us. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

As for the waters, the living waters of grace and of the Holy Spirit, these shall always flow: in summer and winter shall the still waters be found at your side; yea, they shall be within you "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." Words cannot tell the privilege of the man who lives in God, and lives with God! He need not shiver in the damps of earth—he lives on high; he need not fear the fury of the enemy, for he has a place of defence; he need not dread the lapse of time, his munitions are of rock; he need not tremble at famine and drought, his needs shall all be met by the care of heaven. The man who knows his sins are forgiven, who is covered with the righteousness of Christ, who is in vital union with the Lord Jesus, who is indwelt by the Holy Ghost: that man, I say, need not desire to be any other than he is, but may give himself up to blessing and praising and magnifying the Most High every moment of his life till he is caught up to the highest heaven, to dwell where enemies cannot threaten nor necessities arise.

III. So this brings me to close by urging you, dear friends, to SEEK THEIR FELICITY.

First, shall I need to say, "Do not try to obtain it by hypocrisy"? Since they are so happy whom God favours, do not think that by getting your name into their church-book you will necessarily be favoured too. Oh, brethren, be true believers and not make-believers. Do not pretend to be what you are not. Sinners in Zion are still sinners, and they will one day be afraid. Hypocrites, though joined with the people of God, are still hypocrites, and will ere long be surprised with fearfulness. Do

not hope by a mere empty profession to win the blessedness of God's people; for by such means you will win a curse rather than a blessing.

Secondly, do not hope to win the bliss of the righteous by self-righteousness; for although we have been describing righteous men this morning, yet we have not been describing self-righteous men. The self-righteous is not righteous: the two things are wide as the poles asunder. These very people whom God favoured had sinned; for we read in the twenty-fourth verse of the chapter, "The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." The blessing is not to the man who glories in his innocence, but "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." These favoured people cried, "O Lord, be gracious unto us." They knew their need of grace. Do not hope that God will favour you when you neither confess your sin nor seek his grace. Self-righteousness damneth; it is only the righteousness of God that saveth. Seek the character and the privilege of the saints as a gift of divine grace. Fain would I drop into your hearts and mouths that prayer of the second verse: "O Lord, be gracious unto us." I commend it to you. Go to your homes, and in your silent chamber pour out your hearts with cries and tears, saying, "O Lord, be gracious unto us. We cannot walk in thy ways, and keep our tongue and eye and ear as we desire to do unless we be renewed and preserved by thy grace. Be gracious in forgiving the past and in helping us for the future to live in thy fear and service. Do this through Christ Jesus our Lord, we implore thee.

Your prayer shall be heard, and these blessings shall be yours; but see to it that you seek unto the Lord by a sincere faith. Again, use the second verse as your guide, and cry, "Be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble." Commit yourself to the guardian care of the Lord each day, and specially fly to him in the hour of trouble; then will he create righteousness in you, and cause you in every good work to do his will. Go, I say, and seek unto the Strong for strength, and to the Righteous One for righteousness, and the blessings of the dweller upon the heights shall be yours.

As for you, my dear brothers and sisters, who are really walking before the Lord aright, straining with your utmost endeavours to do only that which is just and true, at the same time trusting alone in Jesus for your salvation, I would charge you to rejoice exceedingly. If this text be true, that we dwell on high and that our place of defence is the munitions of rocks, and that our bread shall be given us and our waters shall be sure, let us be glad! What a happy people we ought to be! We ought, every one of us, to have a beaming face, a flashing eye, an elastic step, a singing life, a courageous heart. All men should be made to feel that the chosen of the Lord are a happy people. It is our privilege beyond that of all other men to go through the world with heaven about our steps. It is not ours to be clad in the weeds of sorrow, for the Bridegroom is with us. We are not commanded to complain, but to rejoice. I leave to others the task of showing the beauty of groaning, or the delightfulness of murmuring: it is mine to urge you to shake yourselves from the dust, and put on your beautiful garments. Why are you so cast down? Dear people of God, you go out in the streets in rags, and yet you have royal robes provided for you;

why do not you put them on? "Oh," say you, "but I have great sorrow." Yes, but it is written, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." Why tell everybody of your grief? Is there any good to be done thereby? What does our Lord say? "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast." It is a Christian's duty to be happy. What a blessed religion is that in which joy is a matter of precept—"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice."

I have been so long away from England that I do not know where our Queen is residing just now; but if I had the wings of a dove, and could mount into the upper air, I would soon find out. I should look for the Royal Standard. I should see it floating over Windsor or Osborne, and by this token I should espy the royal abode. Fling out the banner to the breeze when the king is within. Is the king at home with you, dear brother? Do not forget to display the standard of holy joy. Hoist it, and keep it flying. When the Bridegroom is not with us we will mourn; but so long as we see his face no man can make us fast. Rejoice, and yet again rejoice, and thus let the Royal Standard fly at the top of the tower: the King is within us! The Prince of Peace is enthroned in our hearts! The Lord is exalted, for he dwelleth on high, and we dwell on high with him. Glory be unto his name. Ring the joy-bells! With clamour of united joy let us shout unto our God who maketh us to ride upon the high places of the earth! Let it be known abroad that there is no God like our God and no people like his people. Under heaven there are none so joyous as the Lord's afflicted saints, none so rich as the Lord's poor, none so honoured in heaven as those that are despised of men for Christ's sake, none so worthy to be envied as those who to-day are ridiculed for their faith in God. The Lord be with you, and bless every one of you with the full enjoyment of this majestic text, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah xxxiii.

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AN ASTOUNDING MIRACLE.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 10TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee." —Mark i. 21—28.

YOU will find the same narrative in Luke, at the fourth chapter, from the thirty-first to the thirty-seventh verse. It will be handy for you to be able to refer to the second passage, from which I shall quote one or two matters.

These two evangelists commence the narrative by telling us of the singular authority and power which there was about the Saviour's teaching—authority, so that no man dare question his doctrine; power, so that every man felt the force of the truth which he delivered. "They were astonished at his teaching, for his word was with power." Why was it that the Saviour's teaching had such a remarkable power about it? Was it not, first, because he preached the truth? There is no power in falsehood except so far as men choose to yield to it because it flatters them; but there is great force in truth, it makes its own way into the soul. As long as men have consciences they cannot help feeling when the truth is brought to bear upon them. Even though they grow angry their very resistance proves that they recognize the force of what is spoken. Moreover, the Saviour spoke the truth in a very natural, unaffected manner: the truth was in him, and it flowed freely from him. His manner was truthful as well as his matter. There is a way of speaking truth so as to make it sound like a lie. Perhaps there is no greater injury done to truth than when it is spoken in a doubtful manner, with none of the accent and emphasis of conviction. Our Saviour spoke as the oracles of God: he spoke truth as truth should be spoken, unaffectedly and naturally: as one who did not preach pro-

fessionally, but out of the fulness of his heart. You all know how sermons from the heart go to the heart. Moreover, our great Exemplar delivered his teaching as one who most heartily believed what he was speaking, who spake what he did know, yea, spoke of things which were his own. Jesus had no doubts, no hesitancy, no questions, and his style was as calmly forcible as his faith. Truth seemed to be reflected from his face just as it shone forth from God in all its native purity and splendour. He could not speak otherwise than he did, for he spake as he was, as he felt, and as he knew. Our Lord spoke as one whose life supported all that he taught. Those who knew him could not say, "He speaks after a right kind, but he acts otherwise." There was about his whole conduct and deportment that which made him the fit person to utter the truth, because the truth was incarnate, and embodied, and exemplified in his own person. Well might he speak with great assurance when he could say, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" He was himself as pure as the truth which he proclaimed. He was not a speaking-machine, sounding out something with which it has no vital connection; but out of the midst of his own heart there flowed rivers of living waters. Truth overflowed at his lips from the deep well of his soul; it was in him and therefore came from him. What he poured forth was his own life, wherewith he was endeavouring to impregnate the lives of others. Consequently, for all these reasons, and many besides, Jesus spake as one that had authority: his tone was commanding, his teaching was convincing.

Meanwhile, the Holy Ghost who had descended upon him in his baptism, rested upon him, and bore witness by his divine operations in the consciences and hearts of men. If Jesus spake of sin, the Spirit was there to convince the world of sin; if he set forth a glorious righteousness, the Holy Ghost was there to convince the world of righteousness; and when he told men of the coming judgment, the Holy Ghost was present to make them know that a judgment would surely come at which each of them must appear. Because of his unlimited anointing by the Spirit, our Lord spake with power and authority of the most astonishing kind, so that all who heard him were compelled to feel that no ordinary Rabbi stood before them.

That power and authority was seen all the more in contrast with the Scribes; for the Scribes spake hesitatingly; they quoted authority; they begged leave to venture an opinion; they supported their ideas by the opinion of Rabbi this, although it was questioned by Rabbi the other; they spent their time in tying and untying knots before the people, quibbling about matters which had no practical importance whatever. They were wonderfully clear upon the tithing of mint and anise; they enlarged most copiously upon the washing of cups and basins; they were profound upon phylacteries and borders of garments. They were at home upon such rubbish, which would neither save a soul, nor slay a sin, nor suggest a virtue. While handling the Scriptures they were mere word-triflers, letter-men, whose chief object was to show their own wisdom. Such attempts at oratory and word-spinning were as far as the poles asunder from the discourses of our Lord. Self-display never entered into the mind of Jesus. He himself was so absorbed in what he had to teach that his hearers did not exclaim, "What a preacher

is this!" but, "What a word is this!" and "What new teaching is this!": the word and the teaching with their admirable authority and amazing power subduing men's minds and hearts by the energy of truth. Men acknowledged that the great teacher had taught them something worth knowing, and had so impressed it upon them that there was no shaking themselves free of it.

Now, when they were beginning to perceive this authority in his word, our Lord determined to prove to them that there was real power at the back of his teaching, that he had a right to use such authority, for he was Jesus Christ the Son of God, clothed with divine authority and power. It occurred to him to display before their eyes the fact that as there was power about his speech, there was also power about himself, that he was mighty in deed as well as in word; and hence he wrought the miracle now before us. This most astounding deed of authority and power has been passed over by certain expositors as having too little of incident about it to be of much interest, whereas, to my mind, it rises in some respects above all other miracles, and is certainly excelled by none in its forcible demonstration of our Lord's authority and power. It is the first miracle which Mark gives us; it is the first which Luke gives us; and it is in some respects the first of miracles, as I hope I may show ere I have done. Remember, however, that the object of the miracle is to reveal more fully the power and authority of our Lord's word, and to let us see by signs following that his teaching has an omnipotent force about it. This truth is much needed at the present moment; for if the gospel does not still save men, if it is not still "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," then the attacks of scepticism are not easily repelled; but if it be still a thing of power over the minds of men, a power conquering sin and Satan, then they may say what they like, our only answer shall be to lament their doubts and to scorn their scorning. O for an hour of the Son of man! O where is he that trod the sea, and bade the rage of hell subside with a word?

I. First, then, to show forth this power and authority, OUR LORD SELECTS A MOST UNHAPPY PERSON ON WHOM TO PROVE HIS POWER.

This person was, first, *one possessed.* A devil dwelt within him. We cannot explain this fact any more than we can explain madness. Many things which happen in the world of mind are quite inexplicable, and for the matter of that so are many facts in the world of matter. We accept the recorded fact—an evil spirit entered into this man, and continued in him. Satan, you know, is God's ape; he is always trying to imitate him, to caricature him; so, when God became incarnate, it occurred to Satan to become incarnate too; and this man I may call, without any misuse of words, an incarnate devil; or, at any rate, the devil was incarnated in him. He had become like a devil in human form, and so was in a certain manner the opposite of our Lord Jesus. In Jesus dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily by an eternal union; in this man the devil dwelt for a while. Is not this an awful picture? But note the fact, the man whom Jesus selects whereon to prove his power and authority was so far gone that the foul fiend controlled his mind, and made a kennel of his body. I wondered, when thinking this over, whether a person of whom this man is the emblem

would come into the congregation to-day; for I have seen such people. I have not dared personally to apply such an epithet to any man, but I have heard it applied: I have heard disgusted friends and indignant neighbours, worn out with the drunken profanity, or horrible filthiness, of some man say, "He does not seem to be a man; he acts like the evil one." Or when it has been a woman, they have said, "All that is womanly is gone; she seems to be a female fiend." Well, if such shall come within sound of my voice, or within reading of this sermon, let them take note that there is help, hope, and health even for them. The power of Jesus knows no limit. Upon one who was the Devil's Own did our gracious Lord display his authority and power in connection with his gospel teaching; and he is not less able now than then.

This man, further, was *one whose personality was to a great extent merged in the Evil One.* Read the twenty-third verse: "There was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit;" the rendering might be equally accurate if we read it, "A man in an unclean spirit." See you that? Not only a man *with* an unclean spirit in him, but a man *in* an unclean spirit. The phrase is simple enough; we speak of a man being in drink. For liquor to be in a man does not mean half so much as for a man to be in liquor. To give a more pleasant illustration, we speak of a person's being "in love;" he is absorbed in his affection; we should not express a tenth as much if we said that love is in the man. A man can be in a rage, in a passion; and even so was this man in an evil spirit. He was completely ruled of the evil one. The poor creature had no power over himself whatever, and was not himself actually responsible; in all that I say of him I am not condemning *him*, but only using him as a type of human sin. Please do not forget this. As far as the narrative is concerned the man himself scarcely appears; it is the unclean spirit that cries out, "Let us alone; I know thee who thou art." These are words spoken by the man, but they are the sentiments of the demon who used the man's organs of speech according to his own will. The man was scarcely a man with a will or wish of his own; in fact, you do not notice him till you see him flung down into the midst of the synagogue; you only see the proper man when the Saviour raises him up before them all unharmed and rational. Until the miracle is wrought the man is lost in the unclean spirit that dominates him. Have you never seen such men? You say sometimes, and you say truly, "Alas, poor wretch! The drink has the mastery over him; he would never do such things as he does if he was not in drink." We do not mean to excuse him by such an expression, far from it. Or it may be the man is a gambler, and you say, "He is quite besotted by gaming; though he impoverishes his wife and children, yet he is possessed by that spirit so completely that he has not the mind nor the will to resist the temptation." Or it may be that such another person is carried away with unchaste affections, and we say, "How sad! There was something about that man which we used to like; in many points he was admirable, but he is so deluded by his bad passions that he does not seem to be himself." We almost forget the man, and think mainly of the dreadful spirit which has degraded him below the beasts. The type and emblem of such a person as that our Lord selected as the platform whereon

to show his power. I wonder whether this voice of mine will reach one of that sort. I sincerely hope that none of you are in such a condition; but if you should be, still there is hope for you in Christ Jesus: he is able to deliver such as are led captive at the will of Satan. Though you seem wholly given up and utterly abandoned to the dominion of a terrible sin, to which you yield a willing obedience, yet Jesus can break off the iron yoke from your neck and bring you into the liberty of holiness. It will be an awful thing for you to die in your sins, and you surely will unless you believe in the Lord Jesus; but if you look to him, he can make you pure and holy, and create you anew.

Note further, for we must show you how our Lord selects the worst of cases, it was a man *in whom the evil spirit was at his worst.* Kindly look at the fourth chapter of Luke, verse thirty-three, and you will see that in this man there was "the spirit of an unclean devil." Think of that. The devil is never particularly clean at any time; what must an unclean devil be? The ruling spirit in the man was not only a devil, but an *unclean* devil. Satan sometimes cleans himself up, and comes out quite bright and shining, like an angel of light; but do not mistake him; he is still a devil, for all his pretended purity. There are glittering sins, and respectable sins, and these will ruin souls; but this poor man had a disreputable demon in him, a spirit of the foulest, coarsest, and most abominable order. I suppose this foul spirit would incite its victim to filthy talk and obscene acts. The evil one delights in sins against the seventh commandment. If he can lead men and women to defile their bodies he takes special delight in such crimes. I doubt not that this poor creature was reduced to the most brutal form of animalism; I can well believe that in his body he was filthy, and that in his talk, in all the thoughts that hurried through his poor brain, and in all his actions, he went to a pitch of uncleanness upon which we need not permit a conjecture. If we were to say of such a character as this man pictures, "Let us turn out of the way," who could blame us? If we separated from such sinners, who could censure us? We do not desire to go near to Satan in any shape, but most of all we would shun him when he is openly and avowedly unclean. You say, "We could not bear to hear the man speak; the very look of him is offensive;" nor is it strange that you should. There are women so fallen that modesty trembles to be seen in their company; and the feeling that makes you shudder at them is not to be condemned, so long as it does not spring from self-righteousness or lead to contempt. Yet, now, see it and wonder, our blessed Lord and Master fixed his eye of old on the man with the unclean devil in him, and to-day he fixes his eye of mercy on the basest and vilest of mankind, that in their conversion he may show the power and authority of his word. Lord, do so at this moment. Let us see to-day the miracles of thy grace. Bring the chief of sinners to repentance! Upraise those who are fallen to the lowest degree!

In this man there did not seem to be anything for the Lord to begin upon. When you are trying to bring a man to the Saviour you look over him to see where you can touch him, what there is in him that you can work upon. Perhaps he is a good husband though he is a drunkard, and you wisely attempt to work upon his domestic affections. If a man

has some point of character upon which you can rest your lever, your work is comparatively easy. But with some people you look over them from top to bottom, and you cannot find a spot for hope to rest upon; they seem so utterly gone that there is neither reason, nor conscience, nor will, nor power of thought left in them. Of all this the possessed man in the synagogue is a striking emblem, for when the Lord comes into the synagogue the poor wretch does not begin to pray, "Lord, heal me." No, his first cry is, "Let us alone." He does not seem to resist this cry of the evil spirit in him, though it was so much to his own injury, but he goes on to say, "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art." The possessed man seems wholly lost in the dominating spirit of evil which permeates his entire being. Now I look upon this, though it be negative, as a very glaring part of the difficulty; for I do not care how far a man has gone in outward sin, if he has some point left in him of common honesty, or love to his family, or generous heartedness, you know where to commence operations, and your work is hopeful. Even leviathan has some crevice between his scales though they be shut up together as with a close seal; there is some joint in the harness of most men, even though mail may cover them from head to foot; but in those outcasts of whom I am now speaking there is neither lodgment for hope, nor foothold for faith, nor more than a bare ledge for love. As the man in the synagogue was shut up within the demon's influence, so are some men encompassed by their iniquity, blocked up by their depravity. Yet the great Upraiser of the fallen can rescue even these; he is able to save unto the uttermost.

One other matter makes the case still more terrible: *he was a man upon whom religious observances were lost.* He was in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and I do not suppose that this was anything unusual. The worst man of all is one who can attend the means of grace, and yet remain under the full power of evil. Those poor outside sinners who know nothing of the gospel at all, and never go to the house of God at all, for them there remains at least the hope that the very novelty of the Holy Word may strike them; but as for those who are continually in our synagogues, what shall now be done for them if they remain in sin? It is singular, but true, that Satan will come to a place of worship. "Oh," say you, "surely he will never do that?" He did it so long back as the days of Job, when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also amongst them. The evil spirit led this unhappy man to the synagogue that morning, and it may be he did so with the idea of disturbing the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am glad he was there. I wish that all the slaves of sin and Satan would attend upon Sabbath worship. They are then within range of the gospel gun, and who can tell how many may be reached? Yet how sad it was that the influences of religious worship had altogether failed to rescue this man from his thraldom! They sang in the synagogue, but they could not sing the evil spirit out of him; they read the lessons of the day in the synagogue, but they could not read the foul spirit out of him; they gave addresses from passages of Scripture, but they could not address the unclean spirit out of him; no doubt some of the godly prayed for him, but they could not pray the devil out of

him. Nothing can cast out Satan but the word of Jesus himself. His own word, from his own lip, hath power and authority about it, but everything short of that falls to the ground. O Divine Redeemer, let thine omnipotence be displayed in turning great sinners into sincere penitents!

You see, then, what a terrible case the Master selected. I have not exaggerated, I am sure. O the comfort which lies in the thought that he still chooses to save persons, of whom this wretched being is the fit emblem and representative! O ye vilest of the vile, here is hope for you!

II.—Let us now look a little further and observe that OUR LORD ENCOUNTERS A FIRMLY-ENTRENCHED ENEMY.

The evil spirit in this man had ramparted and bulwarked himself against the assault of Christ, for as I have said, *he had the man fully at his command*, he could make him say and do whatever he pleased. He had that man so at his command that he brought him to the synagogue that day, and *he compelled him to become a disturber of the worship.* Quietness and order should be in the assemblies of God's people, but this poor soul was egged on to cry out and make horrible noises, so as to raise great tumult in the congregation. The Jews allowed all the liberty they could to persons possessed, and so long as their behaviour was bearable they were tolerated in the synagogues; but this poor mortal broke through the bounds of propriety, and his cries were a terror to all. But see, the Lord Jesus deals with this disturber; this is the very man in whom he will be glorified. So have I seen my Lord convert his most furious enemy, and enlist unto his service the most violent of opposers.

The evil one *compelled his victim to beg to be left alone:* as we have it here, "Let us alone." In the Revised Version of Luke the same rendering is put in the margin, but in the text we have "Ah!" While the Lord Jesus was teaching there was suddenly heard a terrible "Ah!" A horrible, hideous outcry startled all, and these words were heard: "Ah! What have we to do with thee?" It was not the voice of supplication; it was distinctly the reverse; it was a prayer not *for* mercy, but *against* mercy. The translation is however quite good if we read, "Let us alone." Is it not a horrible thing that Satan leads men to say, "Do not trouble us with your gospel! Do not bother us with religion! Do not come here with your tracts! Let us alone!" They claim the wretched right to perish in their sins, the liberty to destroy their own souls. We know who rules when men speak thus: it is the prince of darkness who makes them hate the light. Oh, my hearers, do not some of you say, "We do not want to be worried with thoughts of death, and judgment, and eternity; we do not desire to hear about repentance and faith in a Saviour; all we want of religious people is that they will let us alone." This cruel kindness we cannot grant them. How can we stand by and see them perish? Yet how sad the moral condition of one who does not wish to be made pure! You would think it impossible for Jesus to do anything with a man while he is crying out, "Let us alone"; yet it was the evil spirit in this man that our Lord met and overcame. Is there not encouragement for us to deal with those who give us no welcome, but shut the door in our faces?

The foul spirit *made the man renounce all interest in Christ;* he coupled

him with himself, and made him say, "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?" This was a disclaimer of all connection with the Saviour. He almost resented the Saviour's presence as an intrusion. The voice seems to cry to Jesus, "I have nothing to do with you; go your way and leave me alone; I do not want you; whatever you can do to save or bless me is hereby refused. Only let me alone." Now, when a man deliberately says, "I will have nothing to do with your Jesus. I want no pardon, no salvation, no heaven," I think the most of you would say, "That is a hopeless case; we had better go elsewhere." Yet even when Satan has led a man this length the Lord can drive him out. He is mighty to save. He can change even the hardest heart.

The unclean spirit did more than that: *he caused this man to dread the Saviour*, and made him cry out, "Ah! Art thou come to destroy us?" Many persons are afraid of the gospel; to them religion wears a gloomy aspect; they do not care to hear of it for fear it should make them melancholy and rob them of their pleasures. "Oh," say they, "religion would get me into Bedlam; it would drive me mad." Thus Satan by his detestable falsehoods makes men dread their best friend, and tremble at that which would make them happy for ever.

A further entrenchment Satan had cast up: *he made his victim yield an outward assent to the gospel.* "I know thee who thou art," said the spirit, speaking with the man's lips, "the Holy One of God." Of all forms of Satan's devices this is one of the worst for workers, when men say, "Yes, yes, what you say is very proper!" You call upon them and talk about Jesus, and they answer, "Yes, sir. It is quite true. I am much obliged to you, sir." You preach the gospel, and they say, "He made an interesting discourse, and he is a very clever man!" You buttonhole them, and speak about the Saviour, and they reply, "It is very kind of you to talk to me so earnestly; I always admire this sort of thing. Zeal is much to be commended in these days." This is one of the strongest of earth-works, for the cannon-balls sink into it, and their force is gone. This makes Satan secure in his hold on the heart. Yet the Saviour dislodged this demon, and therein displayed his power and authority.

Have I not proved my point? Jesus selected a most unhappy individual to become an instance of his supremacy over the powers of darkness; he selected a most firmly-entrenched spirit to be chased out of the nature which had become his stronghold.

III. We have something more pleasant to think upon as we notice that OUR LORD CONQUERED IN A MOST SIGNAL MANNER.

The conquest *began as soon as the Saviour entered the synagogue*, and was thus under the same roof with the devil. Then the evil one began to fear. That first cry of "Ah," or "Let us alone," shows that the evil spirit knew his Conqueror. Jesus had not said anything to the man. No, but the presence of Christ and his teaching are the terror of fiends. Wherever Jesus Christ comes in Satan knows that he must go out. Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil, and the evil one is aware of his fate. Now, as soon as ever one of you shall go into a house with the desire to bring the inmates to Christ it will be telegraphed to the bottomless pit directly. Insignificant person as you may think yourself, you

are a very dangerous person to Satan's kingdom if you go in the name of Jesus and tell out his gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ opened the book and read in the synagogue, and soon his explanation and his teaching with authority and power made all the evil spirits feel that their kingdom was shaken. "I beheld," said our Lord at another time, "Satan fall like lightning from heaven;" and that fall was commencing in this "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God." The first token of our Lord's triumph was the evident alarm which caused the evil spirit to cry out.

The next sign was *that the devil began to offer terms to Christ*, for I take it that is the reason why he said, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." He did not confront our Lord with the hostile doubt, "If thou be the Son of God;" but with the complaisant compliment, "I know thee who thou art." "Yes," the false spirit said, "I will allow this man to say his creed, and avow himself one of the orthodox, and then perhaps I shall be let alone. The man is sound in his views, and so my living in him cannot be a bad thing after all. I am quite willing to admit all the claims of Jesus, so long as he will not interfere with my rule over the man." The evil one had read his Bible, and knew how Daniel had called Jesus "the Most Holy," and so he calls him "The Holy One of God." "I am quite willing to admit it all," says the devil, "only let me stop in the man; do not meddle with me, and this man's lips shall confess the truth." And so, when Jesus comes in his power, and men hear his word, this deceitful compromise is often proposed and attempted. The sinner says, "I believe it all. I deny nothing. I am no infidel; but I mean to keep my sin; and I do not intend to feel the power of the gospel so as to repent and have my sin chased out of me. I will agree to the gospel, but I will not allow it to control my life." However, this coming to terms shows that the fallen spirit knows his Destroyer. He would fain be let down easily. He is willing to crouch, to cringe, to fawn, and even to bear testimony to the truth, if he may but be allowed to keep in his den—that den a human soul. Liar as he is, it must go sadly against the grain for him to say, "I know thee who thou art"; yet he will do this if he may be allowed to keep dominion. So when Jesus draws near to men's minds, they say, "We will be orthodox, we will believe the Bible, and we will do anything else you prescribe, only do not disturb our consciences, interfere with our habits, or dislodge our selfishness." Men will accept anything rather than renounce their sin, their pride, their ease.

Then came our Lord's real work on this man. *He gave the evil spirit short and sharp orders.* "Silence! Come out!" "Jesus rebuked him." The word implies that he spoke sharply to him. How else could he speak to one who was maliciously tormenting a man who had done him no harm? The Greek word might be read, "Be muzzled." It is a harsh word; such as an unclean tormenting spirit deserves. "Silence! Come out." That is exactly what Jesus means that the devil shall do when he delivers men from him. He says to him, "Come out of the man; I do not want pious talk and orthodox professing; hold your peace and come out of him." It is not for evil spirits, nor yet for ungodly men, to try to honour Christ by their words. Traitors bring no

honour to those they praise. Liars cannot bear witness to the truth; or if they do they damage its cause. "Be still," says Jesus; and then, "Come out." He speaks as a man might call a dog out of a kennel, "Come out." "Oh," says the unclean spirit, "let me stay, and the man shall go to church; he shall even go to the sacrament." "No," says the Lord, "Come out of him. You have no right within him; he is mine, and not yours. Come out of him!" I pray that the Master may give one of his mighty calls at this moment, speak to some poor besotted creature, and say to the devil in him, "Come out of him!" O sinners, sin must quit you or it will ruin you for ever; are you not eager to be rid of it?

Now see the conquest of Christ over the unclean spirit. *The fiend did not dare to utter another word*, though he went as near it as he could. He "cried with a loud voice." He made an inarticulate howling as he left the man. As he came out he tried to do his victim some further injury, but in that also he failed. He tore at him, and threw him down in the midst of the synagogue, but Luke adds, "He came out of him, having done him no hurt." From the moment when Jesus bade him "come out," his power to harm was gone; he came out like a whipped cur. See how Jesus triumphs. As he did this literally in the man in the synagogue, so he does it spiritually in thousands of cases. The last act of the fiend was malicious, but fruitless. I have seen a poor creature rolled in the dust of despair by the departing enemy, but he has soon risen to joy and peace. Have you not seen him in the enquiry-room, weeping in the dismay of his spirit? But that has caused him no real harm, it has even been a benefit to him, by causing him to feel a deeper sense of sin, and by driving him quite out of himself to the Saviour. Oh, what a splendid triumph this is for our Lord when out of a great sinner the reigning power of sin is expelled by a word! How our Master tramples on the lion and the adder! How he treads under his feet the young lion and the dragon! If the Lord will speak with power to-day to any soul, however vicious, or depraved, or besotted, his reigning sins shall come out of him, and the poor sinner shall become a trophy of his sovereign grace.

IV. Lastly, THE SAVIOUR RAISES BY WHAT HE DID A GREAT WONDERMENT. The people that saw this were more astonished than they generally were at the Saviour's miracles, for they said, "What thing is this? What new teaching is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him." The wonder lay in this: here *was man at his very lowest;* he could not be worse. I have shown you the impossibility of anybody being worse than this poor creature was. I mean not that he was evil morally, for, as I have hinted before, the moral element does not actually enter into the man's case; but he is the instructive picture of the worst man morally; utterly and entirely possessed of Satan, and carried away to an extreme degree by the force of evil. Now, under the preaching of the gospel the worst man that lives may be saved. While he is listening to the gospel a power goes with it which can touch the hardest heart, subdue the proudest will, change the most perverted affections, and bring the most unwilling spirit to the feet of Jesus. I speak now what I do know, because I have seen it in scores and hundreds of cases, that the

least likely persons, about whom there seemed to be nothing whatever helpful to the work of grace or preparatory for it, have nevertheless been turned from the power of Satan unto God. Such have been struck down by the preaching of the gospel, and the devil has been made to come out of them, there and then, and they have become new creatures in Christ Jesus. This creates a great wonderment, and causes great staggering among the ungodly: they cannot understand it; but they ask, "What thing is this? and what new doctrine is this?" This is a convincing sign which makes the most obdurate unbeliever question his unbelief.

Notice, in this case, that *Jesus worked entirely and altogether alone.* In most of his other miracles he required faith. In order to salvation there must be faith; but this miracle before us is not a parable of man's experience so much as of Christ's working, and that working is not dependent upon anything in man. When a man is commanded to stretch out his withered hand, or told to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash, he does something; but in this case the man is ignored; if he does anything it is rather to resist than to assist; the devil makes him cry, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee?" The Lord Jesus Christ here displays his sovereignty, his power, and his authority, utterly ignoring the man, consulting neither his will nor his faith, but sovereignly bidding the fiend, "Be silent and come out." The thing is done, and the man is delivered from his thraldom or ever he has had time to seek or pray.

The miracle seems to me to teach just this, that the power of Christ to save from sin does not lie in the person saved, it lies wholly in Jesus himself; and, further, I learn that though the person to be saved be so far gone that you could scarcely expect faith of him, yet the gospel coming to him can bring faith with itself, and do its own work, *ab initio*, from the very beginning. What if I say that the gospel is a seed that makes its own soil! It is a spark that carries its own fuel with it; a life which can implant itself within the ribs of death, ay, between the jaws of destruction. The Eternal Spirit comes with his own light and life and creates men in Christ Jesus to the praise of the glory of his grace. Oh, the marvel of this miracle! I was never led more greatly to admire the splendour of the power of Christ to rescue men from sin than at this hour.

And, to conclude, I notice our Lord *did nothing but speak.* In other cases he laid his hand upon the diseased, or led them out of the city, or touched them, or applied clay, or used spittle; but in this case he does not use any instrumentality; his word is all. He says, "Hold thy peace, and come out of him;" and the unclean spirit is evicted. The word of the Lord has shaken the kingdom of darkness, and loosed the bonds of the oppressed. As when the Lord scattered the primeval darkness by the fiat, "Light be," so did Jesus give the word, and its own intrinsic power banished the messenger of darkness.

Oh, you that preach Christ, preach him boldly! No coward lips must proclaim his invincible gospel! Oh, you that preach Christ, never choose your place of labour; never turn your back on the worst of mankind! If the Lord should send you to the borders of perdition, go there and preach him with full assurance that it shall not be in vain.

Oh, you that would win souls, have no preference as to which they shall be; or, if you have a choice, select the very worst! Remember, my Master's gospel is not merely for the moralist, in his respectable dwelling, but for the abandoned and fallen in the filthy dens of the outcast. The all-conquering light of the Sun of Righteousness is not for the dim dawn alone, to brighten it into the full blaze of day, but it is meant for the blackest midnight that ever made a soul to shiver as in the shadow of death. The name of Jesus is high over all, in heaven, and earth, and sky, therefore let us preach it with authority and confidence; not as though it were an invention of men. He has said he will be with us, and therefore nothing is impossible. The Word of the Lord Jesus cannot fall to the ground; the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. The Lord shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly.

I have gone to great lengths in this sermon because I would reach sinners who have gone to great lengths. Oh that they would accept this message of amazing mercy! He who has come to save sinners is God, and this is the surest ground of hope for the very worst. Hear ye this I pray you; it is the Lord your God who speaks to you, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark i. 1—28.

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A WAITING GOD AND A WAITING PEOPLE.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 17TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him."—Isaiah xxx. 18.

THE people were in a great hurry to be delivered from their enemies. The Assyrians had come up in great force, and were covering the land with their armies. They had already devastated the neighbouring kingdom of Israel, and therefore the men of Judah were afraid that they would be swallowed up quick, even as dry stubble is devoured of the fire. The prophet bade the inhabitants of Jerusalem remain where they were; adding, "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." But they would not listen to the counsel of wisdom; they preferred to follow the suggestion of their fears, and to go down into Egypt for shelter. They were impatient because they were unbelieving. They were slow to obey, but they were swift to rebel: hence the Lord cries to them by his prophet: "Woe to the rebellious children, that take counsel, but not of me." They sent their princes as ambassadors to Zoan to entreat aid from the Egyptian king, yea, they sent a great treasure upon camels as a bribe to Pharaoh to espouse their cause against Assyria. They would not rely upon their God, and so they looked to the land of the viper and the fiery flying serpent, and were stung with bitter disappointment; for vapour and emptiness were the help of Egypt. It seemed as if the motto of the people then was, "We will flee upon horses, we will ride upon the swift." Again and again he urged them to be quiet, saying, "Your strength is to sit still;" but they would not learn that rash haste is but ill-speed. They could not be quiet by reason of their fear and folly; but the Lord waited, and turned not from his long-enduring patience. In the words of our text he showed that if mortals could not wait, yet their Maker could:—"Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you"; and he assured them yet again that if they would learn to wait, they should find it their wisdom and happiness; for, "Blessed are all they that wait for him."

Here is the subject of this morning's discourse. Certain of God's people are in trouble and distress, and they are eager for immediate rescue. They cannot wait God's time, nor exercise submission to his will. He will surely deliver them in due season; but they cannot tarry till the hour cometh; like children, they snatch at unripe fruit. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven"; but their one season is the present; they cannot, they will not wait. They must have their desire instantaneously fulfilled, or else they are ready to take wrong means of attaining it. If in poverty, they are in haste to be rich; and they shall not long be innocent. If under reproach, their heart ferments towards revenge. They would sooner rush under the guidance of Satan into some questionable policy, than in childlike simplicity trust in the Lord and do good. It must not be so with you, my brethren; you must learn a better way. I hope that the sermon of this morning may go some way, by God's Spirit, towards instructing you in the holy art of waiting for the Lord. "Those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth."

The text divides itself into two parts: first, it introduces us to *a waiting God;* and then, secondly, it speaks of *a waiting people.*

I. First, we have here A WAITING GOD. I shall not confine our illustration of this waiting on the part of God to the case of the men of Judah described in the text; but I shall come home to your own experience, and speak of how the Lord has waited, that he might be gracious *to you.* Let us behold his long-suffering towards ourselves. In so doing we shall not be leaving the Scripture, for the text as truly describes our own experience as that of the men of Isaiah's day.

The word of the Lord which is now to be considered opens first with *a wonderful reason for waiting:* "And *therefore* will the Lord wait." "Therefore"—mark the word! The Lord Jehovah does as he wills both in heaven and earth, and his ways are past finding out; but he never acts unreasonably; he does not tell us his reasons, but he has them; for he acts "according to *the counsel* of his will." God has his "therefores," and these are of the most forcible kind. Full often his "therefores" are the very reverse of ours: that which is an argument with us may be no argument with God, and that which is a reason with him might seem to be a reason in the opposite direction to us. For what is there in this chapter that can be made into a "therefore"? "Therefore will the Lord wait." Whence does he derive the argument? Assuredly it is a reason based on his own grace, and not on the merit of man.

The chapter contains a denunciation of the false confidences of the people, and because of these one might have concluded that the Lord would cast them off for ever. If they will have Egypt to lean upon, let them lean on Egypt, till like a spear it pierces their side. God might well say, "Let them alone; they are given to their idols;" instead of which he cries, "Therefore will the Lord wait." He will let them see the result of their carnal confidences: he will allow them time in which to test and try Egypt, and see whether Egypt is not a boaster whose help is to no purpose. Do you not remember when it was so with you? Perhaps you began your religious life with the great mistake of hoping to find salvation in your own goodness; you looked to your feelings, prayings, doings and professions for safety. You thought that your deliverance

must come from yourself, and so you sought to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," without remembering that "it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure." You knew nothing of God's grace, you thought much of your own good works. So many prayers and tears, so many church-goings or chapel-goings, so much of sacraments, almsgivings, and the like; and this would make up a sweet-smelling sacrifice, acceptable to God. Blessed be the Lord who had great patience with you. He had told you plainly enough beforehand that by the works of the law there should no flesh be justified in his sight, and you ought not to have tried that forbidden way; but as you would try it he suffered you to run therein till a gulf opened before you. You worked out the plan of self-salvation, and the net result was bitter disappointment; for you saw that you could not keep the law, and you felt also that if you did keep it your obedience would make no recompense for the sins of the past. You perceived that the wrath of God was your righteous due. An abyss yawned before you; you dared not go further, neither could you trust the sandy ground upon which you stood. You were in great distress of mind, and it was for this that the Lord had in mercy waited. I heard some time ago of a man who let out horses and carriages. A person wished to hire, and, having heard the price, he went round the little town to all other persons in that line of business to get something cheaper; but as he did not succeed, he returned to the first person and said he would hire his horse and carriage. "No," said the other, "I am not going to let you have it. I know why you have come to me; you have been round everywhere else, and if you could have saved a shilling you would not have come to me." I do not commend the tradesman, but I do not much wonder at his conduct. See how much more patience there is in God than in man. We refuse his free salvation, and go round by way of our own merits, and everywhere else, to try and find some other ground of confidence, and then at last, when everything has broken down, we come back to God and to salvation through Jesus Christ; and yet we find the Lord lovingly waiting, graciously waiting—a God ready to pardon.

Further, these people were rebels against God, and the Lord was waiting to let them fully manifest their rebellious spirit, and be made ashamed of it. The chapter begins that way: "Woe to the rebellious children." Further on he calls them "a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord"—was that a reason for waiting to be gracious? Yes, with the Lord sin shows the need of grace, and so becomes a reason for grace. The Lord allowed the people to show their rebellious character—to let all mankind know what kind of people God had to deal with, and that they might in after days have the higher admiration of his long-suffering and of his grace. I think the Lord permits many sinners to go to the full length of their tether in order that they may know in future what stuff they are made of, and may never trust in themselves. Those who from their youth up have been under restraint, do not know the evil of their own hearts and are apt to think that they can scarcely be heirs of wrath even as others; but those who have developed their innate depravity by actual sin dare not dream such proud falsehoods, for their

actual sins would cry them down if they did so. When the Lord leaves us to ourselves a while and just stands back, and lets us have our spin, what pretty creatures we are! Ah me, it makes us blush to remember all! In after years we have to bemoan ourselves, and to distrust ourselves, and to admire the measureless bounty of the grace which chose us, and would not alter its choice notwithstanding all our untowardness. A strange "therefore" is God's "therefore"—"therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious," that the abundant display of the sin within the man may lead to a more thorough and hearty confession of his fault, and to a greater admiration of the splendour of the grace which puts that sin away.

The Lord would wait again for yet another reason, namely, to let them suffer somewhat of the effect of their sin. He permitted them to send their ambassadors to Egypt, that they might come back disappointed, and he allowed the Assyrians to devastate the land, that they might feel the pinch of famine, and learn that it is an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the living God. It has a purifying effect upon men to let them bathe in the bitter waters which flow from the foul fountain of their iniquity. It is well that they should see what kind of serpent is hatched from the egg of evil. Perhaps some of us were left in the same way, and we shall never forget what we thus learned: we were allowed to go on in sin, and we did do so until we began to feel the result of it; and now we flee from it with horror. We put our hand into the fire until it was burned, and now we dread the fire. The quittance of self, the abhorrence of sin, the clinging to the Lord, which come out of our miseries, are all precious; and therefore doth the Lord wait to be gracious—wait until we set a just value upon that grace, and have a due horror of the sin from which it delivers us.

Once more, I do not doubt that the Lord waited in this case to be gracious until the people should begin to pray, for that seems to be the turning point in this affair. The prophet says, "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee." The Lord is listening for the sinner's prayer. How is it that you have not prayed long before, O troubled spirit? Why have those lips been dumb for years? What, with all your sense of sin, and with a clear idea of the misery that will come of it, have you yet refused to pray? Then you may well wonder that the Lord should wait. It is a marvel that he should have any patience with a prayerless soul. The open display of his grace in your soul in the form of pardoned sin will not appear to you until it is said, "Behold, he prayeth." Wherefore, then, are you so slow to cry unto him? If mercy is to be had for the asking, what shall become of the man who never asks? If God saith, "Only acknowledge thy transgressions," what must be the fate of him who will not acknowledge his transgressions? If the Lord sets mercy's door before us, and writes over it, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you," how can we be excused if we do not knock at once? And yet such was my condition once, and such was yours, my brethren in Christ. We did not feel the guilt of our sin, we would not own that we had erred, we did not recognize the misery that sin brought upon us, we did not pray, we did not seek the Lord through Jesus Christ. Yet all that long while the Lord of mercy waited that he might be gracious

unto us, and the reason why he should have exercised such forbearance and long-suffering is hard to see until we look into the goodness of his heart, until we see in the bowels of his compassion the deep fountains of love from which rivers of mercy flow. Behold how the heart of God yearns towards his people. Was it ever more clearly seen than in his long forbearance, his waiting to be gracious unto us?

This leads us to notice, in the second place, *the singular patience of God in that waiting.* What does it mean when we are told that the Lord waiteth that he may have mercy upon us? It means that he kept back the sword of justice. It is inevitable that where there is evil, God shall be angered with it. It is not a matter of arbitrariness with him, but it is inevitable that the Judge of all the earth should take vengeance upon evil and wrong. God must punish sin, this is one of the fixed and settled principles of his very existence. Here the attribute of long-suffering patience comes in and spares the guilty from time to time, giving space for repentance. Justice waits awhile, that love may try her hand, and bring the rebel to a better mind. With some of us the Lord must have drawn the sword right out of the scabbard, and yet he sent it back again into the sheath, bidding it be quiet a little longer. With some of us the Lord must have lifted up the axe to cut us down, for we have been such cumberers of the ground; and yet his mercy has stayed his justice, and the axe has been laid by, and all for mercy's sake. Because of the intercession of the Lord Jesus, the Lord has let the lifted thunderbolt drop, and here we are still the living, the living, I trust, to adore our long-suffering God. There are some dear friends before me who must for ever highly honour the forbearance of God in sparing them through so many years of sin, till at last their grey heads bowed before his grace. It would have been easy enough for God to have destroyed them when they were running riot in their youth; ay, easier to destroy them than to spare them. Have not some of you been in positions where, if you had been killed, it would have seemed only according to the order of nature that you should be? But your being spared was a miracle of providence, a special interposition of goodness. The brand in the fire will be consumed by being let alone; but if it is to escape it must be plucked from the burning. Well, then, bless that God who waited, and held back the punishment that was due to you! Bless the Judge who was so slow to call you to account, who postponed the day of trial, ay, and issued a reprieve, to let you live when you were condemned already.

This patience of God signifies more, however, than delay in punishment, it means *the continuance of privileges;* for the Lord told these people that, although he might give them the bread of adversity and the water of affliction on account of their sins, yet he would not take away their teachers from them any more, they should still be instructed, and warned, and invited to come to him. Now, if God were to send a word of mercy to a man once, and that man wilfully refused his message, it would be perfectly just on God's part if he said, "I will never send another ambassador! It was condescension on my part to invite this rebel to be at peace with me, and since he declines to do so, he has made his choice of war, and surely I will contend with him. As he has made his bed, so shall he lie on it: as he prefers to be my enemy, so let

him be to his own destruction." Ah me, how long does mercy linger? How earnestly she pleads with men to be kind to themselves! Instead of hasty wrath against his people when they rejected his word, the Lord sent prophet after prophet to them, and when they stoned one and slew another, he even sent his own Son, saying, "They will reverence my Son." Still did the heralds of salvation cry, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" Has it not been so with some of us? We heard the gospel when we were quite young, and we have continued to hear it till we are quite old, so patient is the Lord. It may be that I speak to some who have continued to hear that gospel every Sabbath-day, and have determinedly refused it throughout a long life. Shall it continue to be so? Dare we always provoke the Lord? Still the white flag is hung out, and the silver trumpet knows no note but "Mercy, mercy, mercy!" Oh that man would hear that note and turn unto the Lord! O my brethren, the man who loves not the Lord Jesus is already "Anathema Maranatha!" All holy intelligences say "Amen" to his being held accursed; and yet the Lord permits him to tread his courts and hear his word, and gives him space in which to repent of his evil deeds. He waits that he may be gracious unto you, therefore he bids his ministers wait upon you in hope, and proclaim to you over and over again the loving-kindness of the Lord.

So singular was God's patience that he even *increased his holy agencies* to lead the people to himself. He says:—"Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it." Do we not remember how when the public ministry seemed to miss us we began to be bestirred by an inward force more powerful than visible ministries? Conscience cried aloud and accuse us from within doors. I remember well when it dogged my heels wherever I went: it would not be at peace with me until I was at peace with God. Do you not remember in your own case when it began to be very hard to sin; the drags were clapped on and you could not gallop down the hill as you wished to do? You found it hard to kick with naked feet against the sharp pricks of conscience. You found it difficult to go to hell; you had to leap fence, and rail, and ditch, and you are tired of such steeple-chasing. The voice of Jesus from without seemed echoed from within. You could hardly tell whence the voice came, but it was always following and crying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." O the devices of infinite love! What patience was shown by the Lord to send this inward monitor. Why did he not say, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them"? Though we had Moses and the prophets, the Scriptures to read, and the gospel to hear, yet he added to all this the still small voice. In addition to a summons from without he added a pleader within. Did we contend against even this? Alas, we did, for we seemed determined to destroy ourselves. Behold, what manner of patience the Lord has exercised towards us according to the abundance of his grace.

Nay, this is not all; for all this while God was *passing by our rejections of him*, blotting out our sinful refusals, and insulting despisings of his goodness. You know how it would be even with your own child, if you were to say to him, "My child, I am ready to forgive you if you will confess your fault." If he would not acknowledge that he

was wrong, but held out stubbornly, you might have considerable patience, but I question if that patience would last for days and weeks. Your rod would soon be spoken with. Men that have been very famous for bearing insults have at last been compelled in vindication of their own honour to put an end to the provocation. How grievously far have you and I carried our insults of God! Do I not speak to some who are carrying the provocation a long way even now? You will not accept the Son of God by whom alone you can be saved. To save you it was needful that Jesus should die, but you trample on his blood. It was not possible for you to enter heaven unless the Lord Jesus should be your substitute and bear your sin, and you have heard all about that wonderful truth, and have yet acted as if it were nothing to you. You have not believed on Jesus, you have rejected the Father's testimony concerning him, and resisted the witness of the Spirit of God. This you have done for many a day. The tear has started to your eye, but you have wiped it away, and it has gone as the dew of the morning disappears in the heat of the sun. You have at times been driven to your chamber and to your knees, but you have forgotten your hurried prayer, and again the dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. This cannot last always: men cannot always thrust their fingers into God's eyes at this rate. The wonder is that it has lasted so long.

Please remember that all this while God has been waiting but *everything has been ready*, ready for the sinner to come to him. Listen to the divine word—"My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." Alas, they would not come. So it was with us who are now brought in to enjoy the provisions of grace; and so it is with many who are still outside the banquet-hall—they do despite unto the love and mercy of God, and the provision of his boundless grace. Of multitudes Jesus says sorrowfully, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." I wish I could better set forth the singular waiting of the Lord that he may have mercy upon us; but I pray the Holy Spirit to bless my feeble utterances to all that hear me this day.

I must now notice *a most remarkable action which follows upon the waiting*. After the Lord had displayed his patience to his people, he resolved to go further, and he proceeded to a most notable matter which is thus described—"Therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you." You and I would have turned the text round the other way and said—"Therefore will he have mercy upon you, that he may be exalted:" that would be true, but it is not the truth here taught. The picture represents the Lord as it were as sitting still, and allowing his people through their sin to bring suffering upon themselves; but now, after long patience, he arouses himself to action. Methinks I hear him say, "They will not come to me, they refuse all my messengers, they plunge deeper and deeper into sin, now will I see what my grace can do!" He rises as one who means to put forth his power. He stands ready for action. And now, as if that were not enough, he says to himself, "I will be exalted. I will go up to my throne that I may have mercy upon them. I will manifest my power. I will take the ensigns of my dominion into my hand, and act as a sovereign. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and where sin

abounded grace shall much more abound." Oh, how I love to speak of the Lord exalted in Christ Jesus upon the throne of grace. Glory be to his name. Do you see what a wonderful thing is the work of grace in saving men—"Therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you." He will take to himself an absolute sovereignty, mount to the throne, and display his reigning grace. Where else is there any hope for men?

It also bears this meaning. When a man is about to deal a heavy stroke he lifts up himself to give the blow: he exalts himself to bring down the scourge more heavily upon the shoulder. Even so the Lord seems to say, "I will put forth all my might, I will exercise all my skill, I will display all my attributes up to their greatest height, that I may have mercy upon these hardened, stiffnecked sinners—I will be exalted that I may have mercy upon them." As if he would in some way make his greatness to be more illustrious than it had ever been seen before, by doing the most splendid act he had ever done, namely, by having mercy upon these provoking sinners for whom he had been waiting so long.

Oh, but this is a surpassingly glorious text! I remember thinking, "Surely, if God saves me, he will be a God indeed!" He did save me because he is a God indeed. Here is the proof of it: "Look unto me and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth; for I am God." Because he is God he saves those who look to him. Somebody here says, "Well, truly, if the Lord were to crown his patience by bringing me to himself I should think more of his glorious grace than ever I have done heretofore." Just so, and he means to make you think after that manner. Our Lord intends to make you stand at his feet weeping, as that woman did who had been a sinner, and who so loved him that she washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, because she had sinned much and much had been forgiven. Jesus loves to make converts like these. "Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" is a fit speech for a great sinner. But how can we magnify the Lord? He is infinitely great already; how can we magnify him or make him great? We can do it by our thoughts —we can greaten him in our own esteem and in the esteem of our fellow-men. We can cry out in wonder at his exceeding mercy,—"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" We never cry out, "Who is a God like unto thee?" until we see him forgiving sin; then is he robed in a glory excellent and surpassing. The Lord is exalted when he has mercy upon sinners in Christ Jesus; because by this deed of grace he glorifies every attribute, reveals his wisdom, displays his power, honours his justice, and displays his love. His power is more resplendent in saving souls than in making worlds; his justice is more honoured in the sacrifice of Christ than in sending offenders to hell; and his love is more resplendent than is all the gifts of his Providence. If you would see the Sun of righteousness at seven times its ordinary strength, behold it shining with grace and truth upon men who deserve to be thrust into outer darkness. If God has magnified his own name in our salvation, let us magnify it too. O ye saints of his, remember for ever that word, "His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him."

One thing more before I leave this waiting God, and that is, *there is a final success to all this waiting.* When the waiting turns to a glorious transaction of grace upon the sinner's heart and conscience, then the time of love has come. Observe that it is written, "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry." When God has waited for the soul, that soul is brought to wait on him. God's patience is not in vain towards his chosen. When God deals with his redeemed he does not deal in vain. The Almighty is not defeated. Jehovah is an omnipotent God, he works out his own pleasure upon men, and we see him by his patience and grace causing men to pray, ay, and to weep. That is implied in the nineteenth verse:—"They shall weep no more"—then they did weep till he forgave. Their tears and prayers are flowing; for he declares, "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry." Now also they listen eagerly to the gospel; for they count it a privilege that "their teachers shall not be removed into a corner any more." They value their ministers, and look at them with careful love, as it is here written: "Thine eyes shall see thy teachers." Those whom they formerly despised they now esteem and delight in. They begin also to obey the voice of the Lord; for they hear the voice behind them saying, "This is the way." This great change comes to transgressors when God deals with them in his own effectual manner: then they mourn for sin, then they pray for mercy, then they listen with attentive ears to the message of love, and then they bow themselves down before the present God, and desire nothing so much as to be at peace with him.

Meanwhile, one of the chief and most evident tokens of their change is their casting away of the sin they formerly loved. "Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence." See what free grace can do: it is no enemy of holiness, but the direct cause of it. The love of God reigning in the heart makes a man hate his sin. God never forgives sin without making us forsake sin. When *he* casts our sins into the depths of the sea he causes us to do the same. When the Lord says to our sin, "Begone from my memory," we say to it, "Begone from my heart." Repentance, faith, holiness, zeal, all follow upon the effectual working of divine grace. Oh, that all of you were under its power.

For ever blessed be the Lord who waiteth to be gracious, and then, being gracious unto us, makes us gracious, and causes us to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to his honour and praise.

II. Now learn the lesson of the whole subject. Under our second head we have A WAITING PEOPLE—"Blessed are all they that wait for him."

God's waiting people *wait upon God only.* They are not trusting to the arm of flesh, nor looking to the changeable creature. They do not rely upon themselves, nor depend upon their own experiences, or their mental acquirements. Here is their song—

> "My spirit looks to God alone;
> My rock and refuge is his throne;
> In all my fears, in all my straits,
> My soul on his salvation waits."

Dear friends, you can judge whether you are the people of God or not by this—Can you say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him"? "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

God's waiting people *wait upon God expectantly.* They are looking for everything from him, for he is their all in all. They have had a great deal from God, and they expect more from him. They swim in a river of grace already, and they are floating on to an ocean of glory. They know that they have nothing in themselves; but they rejoice that they have everything in their God. Every morning they see that the light for the day comes from above, and so for spiritual things they lift up their eyes to the hills, whence cometh their help. They are not waiting in despair, nor even in hesitation; they are waiting in hope, a joyous and assured hope of blessedness in reserve. They confidently expect to find their way in the Lord grow brighter and brighter, and still brighter, from the twilight of the morning to the shining of the perfect day. Oh, my brethren, let us wait and watch even as men look for the dawn, because they know that it will not fail them.

But, say you, *What are they waiting for?* I answer, God's people are waiting upon him patiently for many things. Sometimes they wait for the tokens of his grace: they are believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet they may not for the moment enjoy the peace and comfort which are theirs by faith. If they had more faith their peace would at once be as a river; but it is well if they have faith enough to wait for that peace. At times faith may be very weak, and then it is well if it clings and abides in its place. A man may believe and be saved, and yet he may not be sure of his own salvation, nor discern the safety and blessedness of his condition in Christ Jesus.

Oh soul, if thou canst not get out of the dark, believe in the dark. If thou hast light enough just to look to Christ by faith, though thou canst not perceive all his beauties and his glories, yet remember thou art bidden to look, and art saved by looking, however dim the light may be. If thou canst but look to the cross so as to trust wholly to the Lamb of God, he hath taken away thy sin. All the joy of the Lord, and all the peace and all the rest that come of faith do not come at once; but thou must wait for them. These are the ripe ears of corn, and thou must plough in hope and sow in faith, ere these can be reaped. The graces of the Christian character, the assurance of faith, the strength of courage, the mellowness of experience, all these are peaceable fruits of righteousness which will come in their season and not before. Surely some of the Lord's people appear to attain to joy and peace at once, and keep it all their days. These are favoured indeed. I wish that we were in like case; but if we are not, let us not despair, but still trust in the Lord our Righteousness.

> "And when thine eye of faith is dim,
> Still trust in Jesus sink or swim:
> When darkness fills thine inmost soul,
> Still all thy griefs on Jesus roll."

If he has never yet given thee a comfortable word, still cling to him as she did whom he likened to the dogs, but who yet replied, "Truth,

Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." It is thine to look to Christ, it is his to give thee light. If thy face as yet be not lightened, yet keep it towards the sun, even Jesus the Lord. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." It must in the end be well with the man who trusteth in God and waiteth for him; yea, it is well already, for the Lord in our text pronounces all such to be blessed, and blessed they are. Let us wait for those spiritual delights and inward joys which are the portion of believers, and if they come not immediately, let us solace ourselves with this present benediction—"Blessed are all they that wait for him."

You have read of those charming seasons which are enjoyed by choice saints in communion with Jesus, and you have said, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" Trust you well and wait; for the Lord will reveal himself unto you. Possibly you are looking back to your own past history, and sighing—

> "What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
> How sweet their memory still!"

Those years which the locust hath eaten shall be restored to you: only be thou hopeful, trustful, and obedient. Lean heavily upon thy God. It is a poor faith which only believes as far as the eye can see. Believe that thy Lord loves thee when he smites thee; believe that he loves thee though he slay thee. Do not doubt the Lord, nor limit him. He cannot change. Hang thou on his arm even when he lifts it to chasten thee. If thou canst not rejoice in the light of his countenance, yet rest in the shadow of his wings. Yes, we must be a waiting people, and assuredly we may not complain; for we caused the Lord to wait for us many a day. What patience he has had! Cannot we be patient?

Sometimes God's people have to wait for the fulfilment of his promises. Every promise will be kept, but not to-day nor to-morrow. God's word has its due season, and his times are the best times. We may also have to wait for answers to our prayers. Prayer will be heard, ay, it is heard the moment it is uttered; but it may not be answered just yet. The bread cast on the waters of prayer will be found again; but it may not be till after many days. Watch unto prayer, if it be long that thou hast sought a favour from thy God. Wait upon the Lord and so renew thy strength. There is a benefit even about hungering and thirsting when it is for the bread of heaven, and the wine of the kingdom. Pray on! Wait on! Knock, and if the door be not opened, knock again, and if the door still be closed, knock again with greater earnestness than before. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." If thine importunity be wrought up to the pitch of enthusiasm, it shall be well with thee; for "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

Frequently we may have to wait for temporal blessings. It may not be safe for us to obtain the desire of our heart, because our heart is as yet too much occupied with the world and the things thereof. We may have to wait for deliverance from trouble, for as yet the furnace may not have accomplished its refining work. You may be ill, and you may pray God to

make you well, but he may still allow his beloved to be sick; to you sickness may be healthier than health. You are very poor, and you would like to struggle out of abject penury. By all means struggle on; but do not murmur if you should not be successful; poverty may be a richer state for you than wealth. There may be somewhat in your character which cannot be perfected except by suffering and labour; and it is better that your character be perfected than your substance increased. None of us can come to the highest maturity without enduring the summer heat of trials. As the sycamore fig never ripens if it be not bruised, as the corn does not leave the husk without threshing, and as wheat makes no fine flour till it be ground, so are we of little use till we are afflicted. Why should we be so eager to escape such benefits? We shall have to wait with patience, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." He waited to give grace to us, let us wait to give glory to him.

Brother, wait cheerfully. If God sees fit to say, "Wait," do not thou be angry with him. Why give way to hurry and worry? O rest in the Lord. Your strength is to sit still. One of the most lovely flowers of the new creation is entire submission to the divine will: he who hath it is not far from heaven. Yet you will have to wait a little for glory which is yours by a covenant of salt. Do you not at times suffer a heavenly home-sickness? Do you not grow weary of these wildernesses, and long for the mountains of spices, and the gardens of the blessed? Do you not long for the wings of a dove? I am afraid you would not manage them if you had them; dove's wings would hardly suit this cumbrous clay. It is not easy to long for heaven and yet to wait; yet we are better where we are than attempting to fly where the Lord has not called us. Wait; for there is yet more business to be done for your Master. Wouldst thou go to thy rest before thy day's work is fairly finished? Wait; for it is needful for others, if not for thyself. Wait and work on! How many years were wasted ere thou didst come into the vineyard! How little hast thou accomplished since! Wait! for the vision of glory is sure; as sure as though it were to-morrow, or to-day at this very hour.

Heaven is nearing! How much further?
Count the milestones one by one!
No, no counting—only waiting
Till the glory has begun.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah xxx. 1—26.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK,"—27, 248, 590.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FAITH AMONG MOCKERS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him."—Psalm xxii. 8.

DAVID experienced what Paul afterwards so aptly described as "cruel mockings." Note the adjective *cruel:* it is well chosen. Mockings may not cut the flesh, but they tear the heart; they may shed no blood, but they cause the mind to bleed internally. Fetters gall the wrists, but the iron of scorn entereth into the soul. Ridicule is a poisoned bullet which goes deeper than the flesh, and strikes the centre of the heart. David in the wilderness hunted by Saul, and on the throne abused by Shimei, knew what it was to be the butt of scorn, the football of contempt. Many a time and oft was he the song of the drunkard, and the byword of the scoffer.

But what have I to do with the son of Jesse? my heart remembers the Son of man. What if David suffered despising and scorn? He knew it but in small measure compared with our blessed Lord. Well is it said, "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord." It is not wonderful that such an one as David should have to cry, "My soul is among lions," when the Lord of all, the perfectly pure and Holy One, was driven to utter the same cry, saying, "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." My brethren and sisters in Christ, if you have to pass through a like painful experience, count it no strange thing, for a strange thing it is not. Reproach is the common heritage of the godly. Do not think that this fire which you suffer is the first that ever burned a saint. Others have had to bear the enmity of the world long before you. Remember that, of old, from the first moment when sin came into the world, there were two seeds, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; and between these two seeds there is an enmity of the most deadly kind, which will never cease. It may assume different forms, and it may be held in check by many forces, but it will always continue for ever the same while men are men, and sin is sin, and God and the devil are opposed. It was so, you know, in the house of Abraham: he was a man that walked before God,

and was perfect in his generation, and yet in his family there were the two opposing powers: Ishmael, born after the flesh, mocked him that was born after the Spirit. When Rebekah had brought forth twin sons, yet the fact of their being twin sons of holy Isaac did not prevent the enmity that arose between Jacob and Esau. Nothing will prevent the seed of the serpent from exhibiting its spite towards the seed of the woman; even kinship and brotherhood go for little in this strife; in fact, a man's foes full often are they of his own household. Count it no marvel, then, if you are derided! It seems to be a necessity of the holy nature of God that it should incur the enmity of the evil nature of fallen man, and that this evil nature should show itself by direct and bitter attack. Remember "him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Henceforth, bow your shoulders to the yoke; expect that if you follow the Crucified you will have to bear the cross, for so it will be. I trust that our present meditation may be useful to any of God's servants who are feeling the sharp lash of envious tongues, that they may not be driven from their steadfastness thereby. If any in their hearts are bowed down because they are conscious that possibly they have given the scoffers some opportunity to mock at them, may they even in this take heart, for David had done so, and yet he was not crushed by the blasphemies of the wicked.

The first thing to which I shall call your attention at this time is, that a truly gracious man is like David and like the Lord Jesus, in that HIS TRUST IN GOD IS KNOWN. Even the enemies of this holy man who is mentioned in the text, and, as I interpret it, even the enemies of our divine Lord and Master, never denied that he trusted in God. This, indeed, is the commencement of their scoff: "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him." From which I gather that every gracious man should have an apparent, manifest, public trust in God. He should not merely trust him in his heart alone, but that trust should so enter into his entire nature that he does not conceal it nor think of concealing it. He should be so open in the avowal of his confidence that his enemies, before whom he is naturally restrained and on his guard, nevertheless are able to spy out this precious thing within him, and are forced to bear their witness, though it be mockingly and jestingly, that "He trusted on the Lord." Such a testimony is all the more valuable as coming from an enemy. You know our character is not likely to be drawn too prettily by those who hate us; the utmost will be sure to be said against us; but if even our enemies say of us, "He trusted on the Lord," we may be very thankful that we have so lived as to extort this testimony from their lips.

What, then, ought a child of God to do in order to show that he really does trust in the Lord? How did Jesus do this? Well, I think that in our Lord's case it was *his wonderful calmness* which compelled everybody to see that "he trusted on the Lord." You never find him in a flurry; he is never worried nor confused. He is beset behind and before with men who try to catch him, but he is as self-possessed as if he spoke among friends. He does not appear to be the least upon his guard, and yet instead of their catching him, before long he either catches them, or else they retire saying, "Never man spake like this Man." He was

always cool, peaceful, ready, self-composed. You notice his inward quietude not only when enemies are round about him, but when he is surrounded by a great mob of people all hungry, starving, famishing: he breaks the bread and multiplies it; but not before he has made them all sit down on the green grass by hundreds and by fifties. He will have them in companies, arranged in ranks, for convenient distribution; and when they are all placed in order, as if it had been a well-marshalled royal entertainment, then it is that he takes the bread, and, looking up to heaven, with all deliberation asks a blessing, and breaks and gives the food to the disciples. The disciples make no scramble of it: it is an orderly festival, and the thousands are all fed in order due, in majestic decorum; for Christ was calm, and therefore master of the situation. He never looks as if he had fallen into difficulties, and then adopted expedients to get out of them; but his whole life is pre-arranged and ordered in the most prudent and peaceful manner. Nothing upon this earth, although he was so reduced that he had nowhere to lay his head, although he was sometimes so weary that he sat down upon a well to rest, could put him out of the way, or disarrange his perfect collectedness. He was always ready for every emergency; in fact, nothing was an emergency to him. What a beautiful picture that is of Christ on board ship in a storm! While they that are with him are afraid that they will go down, that the wind will blow them into the water, or blow the water over them, so that they will certainly be drowned, what is he doing? Why, he is asleep: not because he forgot them—no; but because he knew that the vessel was in the great Father's hands. It was his time for sleep; he was weary and needed it, and so he carried out that which was the nearest duty, and in all peacefulness laid his head on a pillow, and slumbered. His sleep ought to have made them feel at ease. Whenever the captain can afford to go to sleep, the passengers may go to sleep too. Depend upon it, he that manages everything would not have gone to bed if he had not felt that it was all right in the hands of the Highest, who at any moment could stay the raging storm. I wish we could be similarly restful; for then even our enemies would say of us, "He trusted on the Lord." I wish we could have that steadfast, imperturbable frame of mind, in which our Lord untied the knots wherewith his foes would have bound him; for then our assailants would marvel at our quiet confidence. Jesus knew no hurry, but calmly and deliberately he met each matter as it came, and grandly kept himself free from all entanglement. Oh, for the holy quiet which would prevent our going about our business in haste! "He that believeth shall not make haste," but do everything as in the infinite leisure of the Eternal, who never is before his time, and never is behind. If we could do that, and did not get so flurried and worried, and tossed about and driven to our wit's end, then our enemies would say with astonishment, "He trusted on the Lord."

Brethren, this ought also to come out not merely in our calm and quiet manner, but also *by our distinct avowal.* I do not think that any man has a right to be a secret believer in the Lord Jesus Christ at this time. You will tell me that Nicodemus was so; that Joseph of Arimathea was so, and I answer "Yes"; but therein they are not our exemplars. These weak brethren were forgiven and strengthened; but

we may not therefore presume. Times, however, are different now: by the death of Christ the thoughts of many hearts were revealed, and from that day those secret disciples were among the foremost to avow their faith. Nicodemus brought the spices, and Joseph of Arimathea went in boldly and begged the body of Jesus. Since that day when the Christ was openly revealed upon the cross, the thoughts of other men's hearts are revealed too; and it is not now permissible for us to play hide-and-seek with Christ. No; "He that believeth *and is baptized* shall be saved;" "He that with his heart believeth and *with his mouth maketh confession of him*, shall be saved." The open confession is constantly, in Scripture, joined with the secret faith. The Lord Jesus Christ puts it, "He that denieth me before men, him will I deny"; and if you read it, the text sets denying in opposition to confession, so that it really means, "He that does not confess me before men, him will I not confess when I come in the glory of the Father." Our Lord does not reckon upon leading a body of followers who will always keep behind the hedge, hiding themselves in holes and corners whenever there is anything to be done for his glory, and only running out at meal-times when there is something to be got for themselves. I know some professors of that sort, but I have very little to say to their credit: they are a cowardly crew. No, no. We ought distinctly to declare that we believe in God, and we should take opportunities, as prudence dictates, of telling to our friends and neighbours what our experience has been about trusting in God; telling them of deliverances we have received, of prayers which have been answered, and of many other tokens for good which have come to us as the result of our faith in God. To trust in man is a thing of which we may be ashamed, for we find man to be as a broken reed, or as a spear that pierces us to our heart when we lean thereon; but blessed are they that trust in the Lord, for they shall be as trees planted by the rivers of water, they shall bring forth their fruit in their season, and even their leaf shall not wither. God, in whom they trust, will honour their faith, and bless them yet more and more; let them therefore honour their God, and never hesitate to speak well of his name. So, then, I say first a calm belief, and, secondly, an open avowal should cause even our adversaries to know that we have trusted in the Lord.

And, then, I will add to that, that *our general conduct should reveal our faith.* The whole of our life should show that we are men who rejoice in the Lord; for trusting the Lord, as I understand it, is not a thing for Sundays and for places of worship alone: we are to trust in the Lord about everything. If I trust the Lord about my soul I must trust him about my body, about my wife, about my children, and all my domestic and business affairs. It would have been a terrible thing if the Lord had drawn a black line around our religious life, and had said, "You may trust me about that, but with household matters I will have nothing to do." We need the whole of life to be within the ring-fence of divine care. The perfect bond of divine love must tie up the whole bundle of our affairs, or the whole will slip away. Faith is a thing for the closet, and the parlour, and the counting-house, and the farm-house; it is a light for dark days, and a shade for bright days; you may carry it with you everywhere, and everywhere it shall be your help. Oh, that we did so trust in the Lord that people noticed it as much as

they notice our temper, our dress, or our tone. The pity is that too often we go forward helter-skelter, following our own wisdom, whereas we ought to say, "No, I must wait a little while, till I ask counsel of the Lord." It should be seen and known that we are distinctly waiting upon God for guidance. What a stir this would make in some quarters! I wish that without any desire to be Pharisaical, or to display our piety, we nevertheless did unconsciously show the great principle which governs us. Just as one man will say, "Excuse me, I must consult a friend," or, "I must submit the case to my solicitor," so it ought to be habitual with a Christian before he replies to an important matter, to demand a moment wherein he may wait upon God and obtain direction. In any case I wish that it may be so usual with us to ask guidance from above that it may be noticed as our habit to trust on the Lord.

Once more, I think this ought to come out most distinctly *in our behaviour during times of trouble;* for then it is that our adversaries are most likely to notice it. You, dear sister, have lost a child. Well now, remember that you are a Christian woman, and sorrow not as those that are without hope. Do let the difference be real and true, and do not be ashamed that others should observe it. When your neighbour lost her child it occasioned a quarrel between her and God, but it is not so with you, is it? Will you quarrel with God about your baby? Oh, no; you love him too well. And you, brother, you are perplexed in business, and you know what a worldling does: if he has nothing more than outward religion, he complains bitterly that God deals hardly with him, and he quarrels with God; or, perhaps, to make things better, he does what he ought not to do in business, and makes them a great deal worse. Many a man has plunged into rash speculations until he has destroyed himself commercially; but you, as a Christian man, must take matters calmly and quietly: it is not yours to speculate, but to confide. Your strength lies in saying—"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." You must not be so eager to be rich that you would put forth your hand to do iniquity in order to seize the golden apples: that is the reverse of faith. You are now to play the man, and in the power of the Holy Ghost you are now with resignation—with more than that—with a sweet acquiescence in the Divine will—to show men how a Christian can behave himself. I have never admired Addison's words as some have done, who, when he came to die, sent for a lord of his acquaintance, and said, "See how a Christian can *die.*" There is a little parade about *that;* but I do desire that every Christian should say in his soul, "I will show men how a Christian can *live.* I will let them see what it is to live by faith in the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me. Those who do not believe there is a God shall yet be led to feel there must be a God, because my faith in him doth speed so well, and I obtain such unnumbered blessings as the result of it." I say, most earnestly, that especially in the time of sorrow and bereavement, when other people are sore put to it because they have lost their joy, and the light of their house is quenched, it is the believer's duty and privilege by his holy calm of heart to show his trust in God. If religion cannot help you in trouble, it is not worth having; if the Spirit of God does not sustain you when you lose your dearest friend, you ought to question whether it is the

Spirit of God; you ought to ask, "Can this be the Spirit which bore up the martyrs at the stake?" if now that you are passing through these waters you are carried away by them? If our faith shines out in dark times, even as the stars are seen by night, then is it well with us.

Oh, that you and I might in all these ways so live that all who see us should know that we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ! It would be ridiculous if a man went into society with a label on his breast, "*This man trusts in God*," and it would be a pretty clear sign that he needed to be thus ticketed. I would have you shun all distinctive phylacteries in matters of religion as too much flavoured with the leaven of the Pharisees; but when the possession of godliness proclaims its own self, even as a box of precious spikenard tells its own tale, you need not be ashamed of it. Display and ostentation are vicious, but the unrestrained use of influence and example is commendable. In these days when men glory in their unbelief, let us not be bashful with our faith. If, in a free country, men should not persecute an infidel, they certainly ought not to silence a believer. We do not intend to smuggle our religion through the land. It is not contraband, and therefore we shall bear it with us openly in the sight of all men, and let them say if they please, "He trusted on the Lord."

II. Secondly, THIS TRUST ON THE PART OF BELIEVING MEN IS NOT UNDERSTOOD BY THE WORLD. "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him." Observe that they restricted the Saviour's trust to that point—"He trusted on the Lord *that he would deliver him*." But now, in the first place, *our faith is not confined to merely receiving from God.* No, brethren; if the Lord does not deliver us we will trust him. See how firmly Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood to it that they would not bow before the image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But *if not*, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." There was great faith in that "if not." We must not live and wait upon God with a kind of cupboard love, just as a stray dog might follow a man for bones; but we must speak well of our God even if he scourge us, for therein lies both the truth and the strength of faith. Job has put it—"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Whatever happens to us, if our faith is the work of the Holy Spirit we shall hold on to our trust in God.

Neither is our faith limited to what men call deliverance. It is a misrepresentation when his enemies say, "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him;" because though it is the truth, it is not the whole truth. Our blessed Lord continued to trust in the Father though the cup did not pass from him, and though no legions of angels were sent to deliver him from Pilate. Though the enemy was permitted to exercise all his malice upon him until his blessed body was nailed to the accursed tree, yet the faith of our divine Lord and Master was not moved from its steadfastness. He trusted in God for something higher than deliverance from death, for he looked beyond the grave, and said, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy

One to see corruption." In all his pains his heart said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." The blind world cannot understand this. They say, like their father, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" They insinuate that Christian people trust God for what they get out of him. Now I have often thought that if the devil could have put it the other way he would have been very rejoiced to do so. Suppose he could have said, "Job serves God for nought," then the ungodly world would have shouted, "We told you so. God is a bad Paymaster: his servants may serve him as perfectly as Job, but he never gives them any reward." Happily the accuser's grumble is of quite the opposite kind. Neither one way nor another is there any pleasing the devil, and it is not a thing we desire to do. Let him put it as he likes. We serve God and we have our reward; but if the Lord does not choose to give us exactly what we look for, still will we trust in him, for it is our delight. It is a misrepresentation to say of a believer that "he trusted on the Lord *that he would deliver him,*" if he is supposed to trust for no other reason.

And, dear friends, *our faith is not tied to time.* That is the mistake of the statement in the text. They said, "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him"—as much as to say, "If God does not deliver him *now* his trust will have been a folly, and God will not have answered to his confidence." But it is not so. Brethren, if we are in the fire to-night, and we are trusting in God, our faith does not mean that we expect to come forth from the furnace at this very hour. Nay, we may not come out to-night, nor to-morrow, nor next month, it may be not for years. We do not tie God down to conditions, and expect him to do this and that, and then if he does not in his wisdom see fit to do it, threaten that we will trust him no more. The very worst we could do would be to make the Eternal God a slave to time, as though he must do everything at our bidding, and measure his divine movements by the ticking of a clock. The Lord did deliver his Son Jesus Christ, but he suffered him to die first; he was put into the grave before he was uplifted from the power of death; and if it had not been that he died and lay in the tomb he could not have had that splendid deliverance which his Father did vouchsafe him when he raised him again from the dead; had he not yielded to death there could have been no resurrection for him or for us. So, beloved, it may be God has not effected his purpose with you yet, nor has he quite prepared you for the height of blessing to which he has ordained you. Receive what he is going to give you, and take gratefully the painful preliminaries. High palaces must have deep foundations, and it takes a long time to excavate a human soul so deep that God can build a gorgeous palace of grace therein. If it be a mere cottage that the Lord is to build in you, you may escape with small troubles; but if he is going to make you a palace to glorify himself withal, then you may expect to have long trials. Coarse pottery needs not the laborious processes which must be endured by superior vessels. Iron which is to become a sword for a hero must know more of the fire than the metal which lies upon the road as a rail. Your eminence in grace can only come by affliction. Will you not have trust in God if severe trials are ordained for you? Yes, of course you will. The Holy Spirit will be the all-sufficient helper of your infirmities. I say it is

misrepresentation if we limit the Holy One of Israel to any form for our deliverance, or to any time for our deliverance. Let not the Lord of love be treated like a child at school, as if he could be taught anything by us!

So, also, *our faith must not judge at all by present circumstances.* The ungodly world judges that God has not delivered us because we are now in trouble, and are at present distressed by it. Oh, how wrongly the world judged of Christ when it judged of him by his condition! Covered with a bloody sweat and groaning out his soul to God beneath the olives at midnight—why, they that passed by who did not know him must have judged him to be a man accursed of God. "See," they would have said, "we never heard of a man that sweat blood before—sweat blood in prayer; and yet listen to his groaning; he is not heard by God, for evidently the cup does not pass from him." If any man had looked at our Lord Jesus when he was on the cross and had heard him cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" they would have certainly concluded that he was the most ungracious and undeserving of men; for had he been a saint, surely, they say, God would not have forsaken him. Yes, but you see they only saw a little of our blessed Master's career; they only looked upon a span of his existence; what a grievous error it was to have estimated his life by his brief passion, knowing nothing of its grand intent! See him now while harps unnumbered sound his praises and all heaven rejoices to behold his glory, and the Father looks upon him with ineffable delight! This is the same Jesus who was crucified! What think you of him now? You must not measure a man by a little bit of his life, nor even by the whole of his earthly career; for it is nothing compared with the hidden future of his life in eternity. These men measured David's faith, and measure our faith by what they see of us on one day: we are sick, we are sorry, we are poor, we are troubled, and then they say, "We told you so! This faith of theirs is not worth having, or else they would not fare so roughly or be found in so much heaviness." Faith and feeling are in contrast. Outward circumstances must never be made the tests of the value of pious trust in our God. We must not judge God by his dealings with us nor judge ourselves thereby; but let us still hold on to this pure, simple faith that the Lord is good to Israel. Let us love the Lord for a whole eternity of his love, and then for everything, for every turn of his hand, for every frown and stroke and rebuke; for he is good in everything, unalterably good. If with this faith of ours we are praying and pleading and God does not answer us, does not help us, but leaves us in the dark, yet still let not our trust waver. If any man walk in darkness and see no light, let him trust and trust on until the light shall come.

So, then, we have just touched upon two points—that a true man's faith is soon made known, but that, though it be known, it is usually misunderstood. We live among blind men; let us not be angry because they cannot see.

III. Thirdly, THIS TRUE FAITH WILL, IN ALL PROBABILITY, BE MOCKED AT SOME TIME OR OTHER. It is a great honour to a man to trust in God, and so to have his name written upon the Arch of Triumph which Paul has erected in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, where

you see name after name of the heroes who served God by faith. It is a glorious thing to mingle our bones with those who are buried in that mausoleum which bears this epitaph, "These all died in faith." It is an honourable thing to be a believer in God, but there are some who think the very reverse, and these begin to scoff at the believer. Sometimes *they scoff at faith itself:* they count faith itself to be a folly of weak minds. Or else they insult over one particular Christian's faith. "Oh," they say, "*he* professes to trust in God. This man talks after this mad fashion! Why, he is a working man like other people—works in a shop along with me. What has he to do with trusting God any more than I have? He is conceited and fanatical." Or in other circles they cry, "This is a man of business; he keeps a shop, and I dare say he knows as much of the tricks of the trade as we do, and yet he talks about trusting in God. No doubt he pretends to this faith to win religious customers." Sometimes the mockery comes from one of your own family, for faith's foes live in the same house with her. The husband has been known to say to his wife, "Ridiculous nonsense, your trusting in God!" Ay, and parents have said the like to holy children; and, alas! children have grown up to speak in like fashion to their parents to the wounding of their hearts. As if faith in God were a thing that could be scoffed at, instead of being the most wise, and proper, and rational thing under heaven. Faith in God is a thing to be reverenced rather than reviled. True religion is sanctified common-sense. It is the most common-sense thing in the world to put your trust in One that cannot lie. If I trust myself, or trust my fellow-man, I am thought to be in the first case self-reliant, and in the second case I am judged to have a charitable disposition; yet in either case I shall, sooner or later, prove my folly; but if I trust God, who can bring a reason against my confidence? What is there to be ridiculed in a man's trusting his Maker? Can HE fail that created the blue heavens, that settled the foundations of the earth and poured out the waters of the great sea? Can the Almighty retract his promise because he is unable to fulfil it? Can he break his word because circumstances master him and prevent his performance of it? "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." The day shall come when it will be known by all intelligent beings that unbelief of God is folly, but that faith in the Eternal is essential wisdom. God give us more faith in himself. No doubt we may expect to have all the more of the laughter of the ungodly, who will make a spectacle of us for our faith: but what of that? We can bear mockery and much more for his sake who died for us.

And then *men scoff at the very idea of divine interposition.* They judge the Lord's deliverance to be the main point of our faith. "He trusted God that he would deliver him." "Look," they say, "he fancies that God will deliver *him,* as if the Creator had not something else to do besides looking after *him,* poor miserable creature that he is! He is nothing to God—a mere speck—the insect of an hour, and yet he trusts in God to interfere on his behalf." The philosophers laugh whenever you speak of divine interposition, and count that we must be in the last stage of lunacy to expect anything of the kind. They believe in laws, they say—irreversible, immutable laws, that grind on, like the

great cogs of a machine which, when once they are set in motion, tear everything to pieces that comes in their way. They do not believe that God fulfils promises, or answers prayers, or delivers his people. Their God is a dead force, without mind, or thought, or love, or care. He who in nature acts according to law is yet believed to have no power to carry out his own word, which must always be law to a truthful being. Why, some of us are as sure that God has interposed for us as if he had rent the heavens and thrust forth his right hand visibly before the eyes of all beholders. The wise ones laugh at us for this, but we are not abashed; rather do we reply, "Laugh if you like, and as long as you like; but we daily receive unnumbered blessings from God in answer to our cries, and your laughter no more affects us than the noise of the dogs by the Nile disturbs the flow of the river. We shall believe for all your merriment, and if it please you to go on with your laughter we also will go on with our faith." The object of the ungodly man's scorn is the idea that God should ever interfere to help his people in human affairs; but do you stand to it, O true believers; for he does still show himself strong on the behalf of them that trust in him. Let them say, and laugh at you as they say it, "He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him;" but let none of these things move you.

Further, we have known this mockery to extend to *all kinds of faith in the divine love.* "Let him deliver him," they say, "seeing that he delighted in him." Perhaps you have unwisely told out the tale of God's special love to those who are now making merriment of you; you have cast your pearls before swine, and they turn again to rend you. They say, "This man says God loves him above others; that he chose him before the world began; that he redeemed him from among men with the blood of Christ; that he has called him by his Holy Spirit; that he has admitted him into his secrets and made him his child;" and then they laugh again right lustily, as if it were a rare jest. How the world rages against electing love! It cannot endure any speciality in grace. The idea that one man should be more beloved of heaven than another it scouts as horrible. The heathen could not make out a certain brave saint because he called himself Theophorus, or "God-bearer;" but he stuck to it that he was so, and this made his foes the more wrathful. God dwelt in him, he said, and he would not give up his happy belief, therefore they ceased not to mock. It was a carrying out of our text, "Let him deliver him, seeing he delighteth in him." Well, well; we can afford to bear these mockings; for if we are beloved by a king it will not much matter if we are sneered at by his subjects; if we are beloved by God it is a small concern though all men should make us the subject of their jest.

Ungodly men are exceedingly apt to find *amusement in the trials involved in the life and walk of faith.* Their cry of "Let him deliver him" implies that their victim was in serious difficulty from which he could not extricate himself. This is no novelty to the believer, but it makes rare fun for the ungodly. What is the good of faith if the believer suffers like others, and endures the same pains, and losses, and diseases as others? So the men of the world argue. They would be believers too if it would bring them in a fortune, or a handsome salary, or at least a loaded table and a full cup. But when they

see a saint on the dunghill with Job, or in the pit with Joseph, or in the dungeon with Jeremiah, or among the dogs with Lazarus, they sneer and cry, Is this the reward of piety? Is this the recompense of godliness? They like to spy us out in our time of trouble and taunt us with our confidence in God; and, alas, there is so much unbelief in us that we are all too prone in such seasons to question the justice and faithfulness of the Lord, and to say with David, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." It seems hard for us to be mocked by the base ones of the earth, to become the song and the byword of the ungodly; yet this has happened to the excellent of the earth and will happen yet again. Set your account that this is a part of the covenanted heritage, and accept it with joy for Christ's sake.

IV. Now, I must close with this point (though there is much more to be said): THE TIME SHALL COME WHEN THE FAITH OF THE MAN WHO HAS TRUSTED IN GOD SHALL BE ABUNDANTLY JUSTIFIED. I think it is no small thing to have *the ungodly bearing witness* that "He trusted in God that he would deliver him." I have known what it is to be exceedingly grateful to ungodly men for helping me to believe that I am truly a child of God. Somebody, years ago, uttered an atrocious lie against me—an abominable slander. I was very low and heavy of spirit at the time; but when I read it I clapped my hands for joy, for I felt, "Now I have one of the marks and seals of a child of God, for it is written, 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.'" The love of the Lord's brethren and the hatred of the Lord's enemies are two things to be desired. We may gather that we are not of the wicked when they will not endure us in their company, when our very presence irritates them, and they begin to rail and jeer. It has happened unto us even as Jesus said: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." So that there is justification, as it were, of our faith even from the lips of adversaries, and we ought to be thankful for it instead of being downcast about it.

Another justification awaits us, and in due season it will come. Brethren, the day will come when *God will deliver his people.* You will be brought out of your trouble—it may not be immediately, but it will be seasonably. You may most wisely in the meantime learn to glory in your tribulation; your bitters shall turn into sweets, and your losses into gains; your sorrows shall be your joys, your struggles your triumphs—perhaps in this life this transformation may occur, even as the Lord gave to Job twice as much as he had before; but certainly in the life to come you will find the tables turned. Then, what will the ungodly say? They say now, "He trusted on God that he would deliver him;" but they will be compelled to say as they gnash their teeth, "God has delivered him."

Whereas the ungodly ridicule the idea that God delights in his people, the day shall come when they shall be made to see that he does delight in them. When the Lord appears on behalf of his people, and gives them "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning," the wicked shall gnash their teeth, and be filled with confusion. When the Lord shall turn again our captivity, even our most desperate foes shall be made to

say, "The Lord hath done great things for them." They shall wonder and be sore vexed to see how the Lord hath a favour to his chosen. If they do not see it in this life, oh, what an exhibition ungodly men will see of his delight in his people in the world to come! Dives sees Lazarus in Abraham's bosom: what a sight for him! They that scoff at God's poor people here, shall see them exalted to be kings and priests, to reign with Christ for ever and ever, and what will they say then? What can they say but be compelled to bear witness that their faith was justified.

Brethren, at the last great day ungodly men will be witnesses on behalf of the saints. If any doubt whether the saints trusted in God, the wicked will be compelled to come forward and say, "They did trust, for we laughed at them for it." Of this and that man they shall say, "He trusted on God that he would deliver him." In that day the unbelieving will be swift witnesses against themselves; for as they ridiculed the children of God here, they will have it read out before them as evidence of their enmity against the Lord: and how will they answer it? A man is generally much grieved with any one who injures his children. I have known a man behave patiently to his neighbours, and put up with a great deal from them; but when one of them has struck his child I have seen him incensed to the last degree. He has said, "I cannot stand *that*, I will not look on and see my own children ill-used." The Lord says, "He that touches you touches the apple of my eye." Jesus rises from his throne in glory and stands up indignantly while his servant Stephen is being stoned. If I had no other amusement whatever, I would not for merriment sake mock the people of God; for it will go hard with those who make unhallowed mirth out of the saints of the Most High. If any of you have ever done so—if you have done so ignorantly—the Lord forgive you, and bring you to be numbered among his people, as was Saul of Tarsus; and if any of you have done so knowingly, be humble and penitent, and the Lord will forgive you and receive you amongst his people.

But whether ye revile or flatter, it is all one to us. We are at a pass with you: we do trust in God that he will deliver us, and we cannot be removed from this confidence. O ye mockers, we will not be fooled out of our hope, nor jested out of our peace. We cannot find any one like our God to trust to, and so we will not depart from him in life or death, but will rest in him, come what may, even till we see him face to face.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxii.

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FIRST KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND AFTER THAT KING OF PEACE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 3RD, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"First being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace."—Hebrews vii. 2.

WE will not enlarge upon the story of Melchisedec, nor discuss the question as to who he was. It is near enough for us to believe that he was one who worshipped God after the primitive fashion, a believer in God such as Job was in the land of Uz, one of the world's grey fathers who had kept faithful to the Most High God. He combined in his own person the kingship and the priesthood; a conjunction by no means unusual in the first ages. Of this man we know very little; and it is partly because we know so little of him that he is all the better type of our Lord, of whom we may enquire, "Who shall declare his generation?" The very mystery which hangs about Melchisedec serves to set forth the mystery of the person of our divine Lord. "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; he abideth a priest continually. Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils."

Melchisedec seems to have been, first by name, and then by place of office, doubly designated a king. First, his name is *Melekzedek*, which signifies by interpretation, "king of righteousness." His personal name is "king of righteousness." As a matter of fact, he was also the monarch of some town called Salem; it is not at all likely to have been Jerusalem, although that may have been the case. The interpretation of his official name is "king of peace." A teaching was intended by the Holy Spirit in the names: so the apostle instructs us in the passage before us. I believe in the verbal inspiration of Scripture; hence, I can see how there can be instruction for us even in the proper names of persons and of places. Those who reject verbal inspiration must in effect condemn the great apostle of the Gentiles, whose teaching is so frequently based upon a word. He makes more of words and names than any of us should have thought of doing, and he was guided therein by the Spirit

of the Lord, and therefore he was right. For my part, I am far more afraid of making too little of the Word than of seeing too much in it.

This man is, first, named "*Melchi-zedek*"—"king of righteousness" by *interpretation*; and herein he is like our divine Lord, whose name and character can only come to us by interpretation. What he is and who he is and all his character, no angel's tongue could tell. No human language can ever describe to the full what Jesus is. He is King, but that is a poor word for such royalty as his. He reigns, but that word "reigns" is but a slender description of that supreme empire which he continually exercises. He is said to be King of righteousness, but that is by interpretation, by the toning down of his character to our comprehension. Scripture might have called him King of holiness, for he is "glorious in holiness." His character, better known to spirits before the throne than to us, is not to be comprehended in that one word "righteousness:" it is but an interpretation, and most things lose by translation, and so the perfect character of the Son of God, as it stands before the Eternal Mind, cannot be fully expressed in human language. In fact, when our faculties are enlarged, and our spirits raised to the highest platform, they can never reach the eternity of our Lord's sonship, and the glory of his kingdom: the equity of his character, and the loveliness of his mind, both as God and man, must still be far beyond us. But this much is translated to us into our own tongue—that he is a King, and that he is a righteous King—yea, the very King of righteousness—the Sovereign of the realm of equity, the supreme Lord of everything that is good and holy. That, you see, is wrapped up in his name and nature. Jesus is righteousness, and every righteous thing gathers beneath the right sceptre of his kingdom.

But the second word, *Salem*, which, brought down to our tongue, signifies "peace," is in reference to a place rather than a person. You see our Lord Jesus is essentially righteousness, that is interwoven with his name and person; but he gives, bestows, deposits, pours forth peace in a place which he has chosen, and upon a people whom he has ordained, and whom he has brought near unto himself: so that his kingdom of peace links him with his redeemed, to whom he has given the peace of God.

"First, King of righteousness." How early that "*first*" is I cannot tell you. "In the beginning was the Word," but when that beginning was, who knows?—for is he not, indeed, without beginning? First and firstborn, from everlasting thou art God, O mighty Son of Jehovah! First King of righteousness, and then afterwards when men fell, when rebellion, and strife, and war had sprung up—then he came to heal the mischief and become "King of peace." He comes himself as the divine Ambassador, our Peacemaker and Peace; he comes here into this place even into the midst of his Salem, into the midst of his people, and gives us now, as he has long given, the vision of peace; opening up before the eye of faith the completeness, the sureness, and the delight of perfect peace in himself.

The one matter which I am going to set forth at this time is just this—"First King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace." Note well the order of these two, and the dependence of the one upon the other; for there could be no true peace that was not grounded upon

righteousness; and out of righteousness peace is sure to spring up. Righteousness is essential to peace; if it were not first, peace could not be second. If there could be a kind of peace apart from righteousness, it would be dank, dark, deadly, a horrible peace, ending in a worse misery than war itself could inflict. It is needful where an unrighteous peace exists that it should be broken up, that a better peace should be established upon a true foundation which will last for ever.

I shall ask you—and may the Spirit of God help us to do it—first, *to admire the King*, and, secondly, *to enjoy him*—to enter with holy delight into the full meaning of his name and character as King of Righteousness and King of peace.

I. First, I ask you to ADMIRE THIS KING.

This Melchisedec, whom we exhibit as a type, is *such a king as God is*. He is according to divine model. He is priest of the Most High God, and he is like the Most High God, for the Lord Jehovah himself is, first, King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace. The great Creator entered the garden of Eden in that sorrowful hour when our parents had rebelled, and were hiding among the trees to escape his call; and he bade them answer for their fault. When they stood trembling before him in the nakedness of their conscious guilt, they knew him as their King and their Judge. At that moment he was not first the King of peace to them, but first the King of righteousness. He pronounced sentence upon the serpent, upon the woman, and upon the man, gently making much of the punishment to fall aslant upon the ground; but yet vindicating justice before he spake a word of peace. After that discourse, yea, in the midst of his sentences, he spake of peace when he mentioned the woman's seed that should bruise the serpent's head. Then also there happened the slaying of a victim, for the Lord God made unto them coats of skins, of beasts which had, no doubt, been slain in sacrifice, and with these they were covered. In beginning to deal with an apostate race the Lord observed the fitting order of our text: he began with righteousness, and afterwards went on to peace. At the gate of the garden commenced the dispensation of mercy and peace, but first of all there was the pronouncing of the sentence that man should eat bread in the sweat of his face, and that unto dust he should return. Substantial righteousness was dealt out to the guilty, and then peace was provided for the troubled. At the fall God first set up a Judgment-seat, and right speedily a Mercy-seat. Righteousness must ever lead the van.

Well, the times went on, and men began to sin with a high hand. There were giants in those days, and the people of God were mixed up with the men of the world. This is the worst sign of the world's depravity when there ceases to be a division between the people of God and the sons of men. There was an unholy alliance between sin and righteousness; and then the King came forth again, and displayed his countenance, and began to judge, and correct, and call to repentance. Men perceived that the countenance of God towards them was the face of one who is first King of righteousness. Noah's teaching taught men to return unto the Lord, or he would surely deal with them in righteousness, and make a full end. Space most ample was given for repentance, but men were mad upon their follies. He is first King of righteous-

ness, and afterwards King of peace; and so he dealt with that guilty world. He pulled up the sluices of the great deep which lieth under; he let loose all the cataracts of heaven from above, and he swept men from off the face of the earth. Then afterwards he hung the rainbow in the sky, and he smelled a sweet savour of rest; and there was peace once more between God and a race that had to begin again with father Noah instead of father Adam. Righteousness ruled first, and washed out with a flood the traces of ungodliness, and then peace set up her gentle reign upon a new world.

All along, in the history of God's dealings with men, he kept to this unvarying rule. God has never forsaken righteousness, not even for the sake of love. He selected a people for himself; he called his son out of Egypt; he brought his chosen people through the Red Sea into the wilderness, and there he communed with them. But they went astray after graven images; they defiled themselves with the vices of the surrounding heathen. They became degraded and polluted, and then he came again among them as the King of righteousness, setting Sinai on a blaze, making even Moses to fear and quake, compelling the earth to open and swallow up rebels, causing the fire to break out among them, or fiery serpents to inflame their veins with death: for, though to them he was a King of peace, and walked among them in tenderness, and by the fiery cloudy pillar led their band, and in the midst of the tabernacle by his Shekinah unveiled his glory, yet it was then true, as it is now true, "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." He would not bear iniquity. He could not look upon sin without indignation. His anger smoked against it, for he is and ever must be "first King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace." That wonderful wilderness journey is bright with mercy, but it is equally dark with justice. Remember the graves of lusting and the burnings. Israel's God was ever sternly righteous though glorious in grace. It is a high but terrible privilege to dwell near to God, for his holiness burns like a consuming fire, and will not endure evil.

Ay, and when he had brought his people into the promised land, and had given them their heritage by lot, we must remember how they sinned against him; and it was not long ere he brought upon them the Midianites, or the Philistines, or foes of one race or another, so that they were grievously oppressed, and afflicted, and brought low. When they cried to him, then he delivered them; but he took vengeance upon their inventions. He would not bear their sin: he took it exceedingly ill from them that a people so highly favoured should so constantly rebel. He said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." He was to his own elect nation, first, King of righteousness, and then King of peace.

And so it went on until, at last, Israel provoked the Lord beyond measure, and the chosen people went astray to their own confusion, and then with the besom of destruction he swept them off from the face of their land. He scattered them as a man scattereth dung upon the field. Are they not divided to this day among all the people, a by-word and a proverb still, for men everywhere say, "These are the people that forgot their God, and he banished them from their own land, and will keep them in banishment till they return unto their God in spirit and

in truth"? Every Jew whom we see pacing our streets, far off from the city of his fathers, is a proof that the Lord of heaven is, first, King of righteousness.

All over the world, and everywhere, this is God's way of dealing with men. Do not imagine that God will ever lay aside his righteousness for the sake of saving a sinner—that he will ever deal with men unrighteously in order that they may escape the penalty due to their transgression. He has never done so, and he never will. Glorious in holiness is he for ever and ever. That blazing throne must consume iniquity; transgression cannot stand before it; there can be no exception to this rule. The Judge of all the earth must do right. Whatever things may change, the law of God cannot alter, and the character of God cannot deteriorate. High as the great mountains, deep as the abyss, eternal as his being, is the righteousness of the Most High. Peace can never come to men from the Lord God Almighty except by righteousness. The two can never be separated without the most fearful consequences. Peace without righteousness is like the smooth surface of the stream ere it takes its awful Niagara plunge. If there is to be peace between God and man, God must still be a righteous God, and by some means or other the transgression of man must be *justly* put away; for God cannot wink at it, or permit it to go unpunished. Salvation must first of all provide for righteousness, or peace will never lodge within its chambers. The Lord of heaven is first King of righteousness, and then King of peace, so that Melchisedec was such a king as God is.

And now, next, the type is especially meant to teach us that he was *such a king as Christ is;* for when the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, he came with this everlasting and unchangeable rule girt about him—that, though he should be a King, yet he would be first King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace. Why did he not set up a kingdom here below among the Jews? Many spirits would have welcomed him. If he had only set himself up to be a king, promising them sure conquest and abundant plunder, the zealots of the Jewish nation would have fought like tigers at his side. But, no; he came first to be a King of righteousness, and that was a topic for which they cared nothing. He went into his own Father's house like a king into his palace; but it was with a scourge of small cords, crying, "Take these things hence!" The temple was no abode for him while greed, and self, and mammon defiled its courts. In that temple he looked round about him with indignation, for he saw no trace of righteousness there, but every indication that up to the very veil of the temple all was given over to human unrighteousness.

They wanted an unrighteous kingdom, but he would not have it. His fan was in his hand, and he would thoroughly purge his floor. His laws were not to be like those of Cæsar; his soldiers were not to fight with carnal weapons. He came not to set up a kingdom of power and force, but a kingdom of love and truth and righteousness; and hence his own people knew him not, and rendered him no homage. His holiness stood in the way of such a kingdom as the Jews desired, and hence they turned upon him and cried, "Let him be crucified." Though they would not acknowledge his sovereignty, he was their King; and at his death he bore above his head the superscription, "This is Jesus, the

King of the Jews." He would not set up a carnal kingdom of their sort; Church and State, truth and force united in some form or other, must have been suggested to him; but no; he must be first King of righteousness, and then King of peace. He preached no peace apart from purity. He never made little of vice or error; he was the deadly foe of all evil. He said, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword." Until there is righteousness there must be conflict, and peace can only enter when righteousness has won the field. Oh, my brethren, I wish I had power to describe to you how our divine Master in all his lowliness began to be the King of righteousness by his superlative, unrivalled character. Here among us there was never such righteousness as his—such royal righteousness throughout all his career in all the details of life. I see an imperial righteousness in the character of my divine Lord—a righteousness that is master and superior of all other. Even those that hate Jesus cannot find fault with him. Books written to disprove his divine mission are nevertheless full of almost fulsome adulation of him: I call it by no better word, because I think that the praises which infidels have given to our Lord are no more acceptable to him than were the praises of devils when they said, "This is the Son of God!" Then he bade them hold their peace, and I think he has the same wish at this moment touching his Unitarian and Infidel admirers. All sorts of men have been compelled to do homage to this kingly One who has passed across the page of history, the very sovereign of all that is right and good.

But ah, methinks he was most King of righteousness when he said unto himself, "My Father's law has been broken: I will restore its honour. Men have defied it and trampled on it: I will pay to it the highest homage." With this strong desire upon him he went up to the cross, and gave his hands and feet to the nails, and his side to the spear, and with a thorn crown upon his dying brow he became in very deed the King of righteousness. As the Son of God, he rendered unto the divine majesty all the honour due to the law by reason of the many insults which sin had heaped thereon. The transgressions of his people were laid upon their Great Shepherd, they were made to meet upon him in one dreadful storm, and that hurricane spent itself upon him. Our Great Substitute endured the consequences of human guilt on our behalf, and thus he is able to pacify the troubled conscience. He is, first, King of righteousness. He knew that he could not be King of peace to us till, first of all, he had woven a perfect righteousness in the loom of his life, and dyed it in his own heart's blood in his death: but when he had achieved this, then he became King of righteousness, demonstrated to be so before the eyes of all, and then to you and to me he became henceforth the King of peace. How glorious is his name! Oh, for a voice of thunder with which to praise him!

To-day our Lord and Master has gone his way up to the eternal hills where he reigns; but his kingdom, for which we daily pray, is coming; and, mark you, it will come by righteousness. I say no word against those who endeavour to bring peace to the nations by the extension of commerce, facilities for travel, and so forth; but it is not thus that the sword of war shall be broken. Would God the sword of the Lord were quiet in its scabbard for ever; but I never anticipate the

reign of universal peace on earth till first the King of righteousness is acknowledged in every place. I do not think that we shall ever see the fruits without the tree, or the stream without the source, or peace without the enthronement of the principle of righteousness from which it springs. There shall come a day when the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the wolf shall lie down with the lamb—when they shall hang the useless helmet in the hall, and study war no more; but that reign of the joyous King, that era of plenty, love, and joy, can only commence as a reign of righteousness. It cannot be anything else; and until sin is dethroned, till iniquity is banished, we shall not see the divine fruit of peace upon the face of the earth. Wherever Jesus is King he must be first King of righteousness, and after that King of peace.

So, then, Melchisedec is such a king as God is, and such a king as Jesus is.

Note, next, that *he is such a king as right-hearted minds desire.* I say "right-hearted minds." I mean not only those who are saved, but those in whom there is some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. There is an honest and good ground not yet sown, and we know what that soil waiteth for. I remember what my thoughts used to be when I was seeking the Lord; I longed to be saved; I desired to escape from my sin; but with it there always went this thought—"God must be just." I had ever a certain trembling sense of guilt, but at the same time a deep reverence for righteousness. In my heart of hearts I said, "Let not the Lord even for my sake do an unrighteous thing. I am nothing; but God and his righteousness are all in all. It were a greater calamity for God to be unjust than for me to be lost. It were a dark day for all the aspirations of noble minds if it were possible for God to swerve from the strict rule of his integrity. Though he slay me, yet let his name be honoured, and let his righteousness remain untarnished." I remember distinctly being the subject of that feeling. Sinner as I was I had a care for the perfect law of the Lord, and would by no means have agreed to its being dishonoured in order to my own personal salvation. I wanted this question answered—"How can God be just and yet the Justifier of him that believeth?" I did not know at that time the sweet secret of substitution; but when I did know it, no music ever sounded so sweetly in the human ear as that sounded in my heart. When I saw that, by the interposition of the Son of God, and his bearing my guilt, God could be sternly, strictly, severely just, to the letter, in every jot and tittle, and yet could put all my sin away, and take me to his bosom, and let me be his child, then I said, "This must be of God. This divine secret bears upon its own face its own warranty of truthfulness, for no man could have invented a system at once so just to God, so safe to man." To be able to look for mercy as just, and receive pardon on the ground of righteousness, is certainly a high ground to reach; and yet every believer stands there before God. I say that every right-minded man feels a deep concern for the righteousness of God, when he is soberly in his senses, and thinking the matter over. He longs to be saved, that is more than natural; but he does not wish to be saved in a way that would derogate from the supreme splendour of the righteousness of God. Let the Lord God be glorious in justice, and then, if I can be saved, well and good. Blessed be God, we can

be thus saved. Our entrance to heaven can be as justly secured as our banishment to hell was righteously deserved. How justice and peace have kissed each other is now made known. That secret is told us in the Word of God. Is it not written on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?

And I am sure, again, that no right-hearted man wants Christ to come and be to him the King of peace, and then to let him live in sin. Brothers, I want no peace in my heart concerning any fault. If I know myself before God, my heart's inmost prayer is that I may never be able to rest till I am rid of every relic of evil. I do not want to make myself happy and yet to live in a single known sin. If I could have the offer of heaven, and be a drunkard, I wish not for a drunkard's heaven. What could it be but a scene of riot, strife, and obscenity? If I could have heaven and be a liar, I want not a liar's heaven. What could the heaven of falsehood be but hell in truth? Nay, I would not wish for a heaven in which I might freely indulge some minor sin, or be jovial in the commission of some unconsidered transgression. Nay, there can be no heaven for me till evil in every form is expelled from my nature. My God, my longing is not for happiness first, but for purity first, and happiness afterwards; and hence it is my delight to read that my King is first the King of righteousness, and then the King of peace. My heart rejoices in a sin-killing King, and then a peace-bestowing King, sweeping out the buyers and the sellers from the temple, and then manifesting himself there in all his majesty to his waiting people.

Melchisedec, therefore, sets forth such a king as all right-minded people desire.

Again, this wonderful Melchisedec *is such a king as Jesus must be to every one of you who have not yet known him, if you are ever to receive him as your Saviour.* Let me not sew pillows to all arm-holes by preaching salvation to those who do not repent of their evil ways. I do not come here to chant in dulcet tones sweet lullabies to men who sleep in unrighteousness. If you would have peace with God, you must repent of sin. If you love evil you cannot love God. There must be a divorce between you and sin, or there can be no marriage between you and Christ. When Jesus comes to a soul, he comes as King of righteousness first, and after that as King of peace. We must have a positive righteousness of life, a cleanness of heart and hand, or we shall not be found at the right hand of the Judge. Let no man deceive himself. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." He that comes to Christ, and takes Christ to be his Saviour, must take Christ also to be his Ruler; and, Christ ruling him, there must be in that man's heart an active, energetic pursuit of everything that is good and holy, for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." He that liveth in sin is dead while he liveth, and knows nothing of the life of God in his soul. Righteousness must hold the sceptre, or peace will not attend the court.

I know that I speak to many who long to be saved; but will you give up your sin? for Christ has come to save his people from their sins. If you do not wish to be saved from sinning, you will never be saved from damning. Do you hug your Delilah? Then shall you lose your eyes like Samson. Do you hold to the viper, and press the asp to your bosom? Then shall the poison boil within your veins. Christ cannot

save you while sin is loved and followed after, and has a reigning power in you; for it is an essential of his salvation that he should deliver you from the mastery of evil. I would to God that many here would cry, "That is the very thing I want. I long for it. Can I be helped to renounce sin?" O poor heart, if thou hungerest after righteousness, thou shalt be filled! Thou shalt be helped to conquer evil: thou art being helped by the very desire which has been breathed into thee. "Oh," says one, "can I break off the iron yoke, and come out of the Egyptian bondage of my lust?" Thou canst; for Christ has come to set thee free. Trust thou in him, the great Emancipator. But if thou sayest, "I will live in sin, and yet go to heaven," thou shalt never do so. There shall by no means enter into the celestial city anything that defileth. He that takes men to heaven is first King of righteousness, and after that he is King of peace.

I have closed this first head when I have noticed that *that is the kind of king that God would have every one of us to be.* We ought all to be, first, kings of righteousness, and then kings of peace. The Lord has appointed each man his kingdom: let us see to it that we reign for good and not for evil. On all sides we hear voices inviting us to peace apart from righteousness. "Oh," they say to us, "a confederacy, a confederacy." What mean you? You are to preach a lie, and we are to preach the truth, and yet we are to call each other brothers. We are *no* brothers, and we will not by our silence aid the fraud. "Oh, but," say they, "be charitable." Charitable with what? Charitable with God's truth, flinging it down into the mire of error? Charitable by deceiving our fellowmen? That we cannot be. Brethren, we must so hold and love the truth as to hate every false way; for the way of error is ruinous to the souls of men, and it will go hard with us if even by our silence we lead men to run therein. If any man shall say to you, "Come and let us sin together," reply to him, "I cannot enter into association with you, for I must first be pure and then peaceable, since I serve a Lord who is first King of righteousness, and after that King of peace." "Hold your tongue," says the world. "Do not fight against error. Why need you speak so loudly against a wrong thing?" We must speak, and speak sharply too, for souls are in danger. We must uplift the banner of truth, or we shall be meanest of all cowards. God has made us kings, and we must be first kings of righteousness, and after that kings of peace.

God's people are tempted sometimes to be a little too peaceable. Remember that our Lord Jesus has not come to make us live at peace with sin. He has come to set a man against his brother—to divide a household where iniquity holds sway. There can be no peace between the child of God and wrong doing or wrong thinking of any kind. We must have "war to the knife" with that which would rob God of his glory and men of their salvation. Our peace is on the footing of righteousness, and on no other ground. We are for all that is good and right; but we dare not cry "Peace, peace, where there is no peace."

II. Now my time has fled, but I must occupy a little upon the best part of my subject. I have asked you to admire the King. I now beg you to ENJOY HIM.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is first King of *righteousness.* You know

what it means. Shall I tell you what it includes? All who are in him, and one with him in his kingdom, are righteous in his righteousness. His is a righteous kingdom, and those who obey it will be found to have done rightly. If we follow Christ's rule we need never be afraid that it will mislead us. We are righteous, certainly, when we are doing his bidding. If any cavil and say, "Why doest thou this?" quote the King's authority. Do not thou be afraid if thou doest the King's bidding. He is a King of righteousness, and thou art righteous in obeying his righteous ordinances. He who religiously obeys Mahomet may yet be doing grievous moral wrong; but it is never so with the disciple of Jesus: obedience to Jesus is holiness.

Notice, next, that if we trust this King of righteousness we are righteous in his merit. I want you to believe this. If you had always kept God's law and had never sinned, you would have been conscious of righteousness. Now, by faith, as many of you as believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are as righteous as he is righteous in the sight of God—as righteous as if you had never sinned. Oh, I want you to feel this. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God;" but there must first be this justifying righteousness before there can be peace. What Christ did he did for his people. I say not that what Christ did is imputed to his people, though I believe that it is so; but it belongs to his people, for they are part and parcel of him, and so are partakers with him. They are in him as in their Federal Head, and whatsoever Christ is, or has, or does, belongs in itself, in the very nature of things, to all that are in him and in that covenant whereof he is the Head. Stand up straight, then, before thy God, and though in thyself the publican's humble demeanour suits thee well, yet in thy Lord thou mayest take another stand and say, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again." The Lord Jesus is "made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness." "This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness;" for "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners," as you and I know to our cost, "so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." "By his knowledge"—by the knowledge of him—"shall my righteous Servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities."

Now, then, dost thou believe in Christ? Then thou hast no sin. Thy sin was laid upon Christ of old, and he bore the punishment of it, and thou canst not be punished for it. Divine righteousness cannot exact a double penalty for the same offence. Dost thou believe in Jesus? Then he hath made an end of all the sin which was once written against thee. He has buried thy transgressions for ever in his own sepulchre. If thou art in Christ, his perfect righteousness is wrapped about thy loins, and thou standest this day "accepted in the Beloved." Oh, it is a glorious standing, Jesus the King of righteousness, and we in our King made righteous. We are comely through the comeliness of Christ which is put upon us.

Now this I want you to think of. Whenever you are enjoying the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, please to recollect that he never gives you any part of salvation without giving it to you righteously; and if he gives it to you righteously you are possessed of it righteously. My sins

are pardoned. Yes, and righteously pardoned. Oh, is not this a wonder? Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. If I pray, I have naturally no right to be heard as a sinner; but, using the name of Christ, I expect to be heard as righteously as if I were the new-created Adam fresh from the hand of Deity. When I come before God and ask his protection, I look for it as righteously as Christ looked for it when he was here below, for he has put upon me, a poor unworthy believer, all his regal rights; and all his righteousness is mine, so that I may use his name at the foot of my prayers, and stamp my petitions with his Christly authority. I may take the blessings of the covenant as freely as he may take them who bought them with his blood; for he bought them for all his people, and he has made transfer of all the covenant estate to all who are in him. Oh, brothers, it is a dreadful thing to be under a sense of sin, but it is an equally blessed thing to be under a sense of righteousness. We are righteous even as he is righteous. Let us never forget this.

And then, next, he is after that King of *peace*. I want you to try to-night—nay, I do not want you to try, I want the Holy Spirit to do it for you—I want you to enjoy the King of Salem, the King of peace. Do you know that at this moment, if you are a believer, you have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord? There is no quarrel between you and God to-night. You are one with him, your delight is in him. I know not now in my own soul of aught that I could say against the Lord's dealings with me throughout the whole of my life; nor, let him deal with me as he wills, do I feel any repugnance to putting myself entirely into his hands. For weal or woe, for wealth or poverty, for life or death, I am content to hand myself over to the Lord absolutely. And now, there being peace on the poor creature's side, it is such a joy to think that there is peace from God's side, only still more perfect and enduring. He looks at you through his dear Son, and he sees no sin in you—no iniquity in you. He loves you with a perfect love at this moment, and he knows of no just cause or impediment why he should not love you. "Why," says one, "I have not been a believer more than a week." I do not care if you have not been a believer more than ten minutes: he that believeth hath everlasting life and everlasting love. As soon as the prodigal son was home, what did his father do? Upbraid him? No, he kissed him. Had his father no fault to find? No, not any. He said, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him. Put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Let us eat and be merry." Why did he not say, "Come, my dear son, I must have a little sharp talk with you, for your good. You know you have behaved very badly to me. I must chide with you and upbraid you"? No, no. Not a word of the sort. Not a syllable or even a look after that fashion. He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not. He puts his dear child at perfect ease with himself, and says, "Be at home. Be happy. Eat, drink, and be merry with me; for you are my child, and though you were lost, you are found. You were dead, but you are alive again. Let us rejoice together in this blessed salvation which glorifies my Son."

I want you to sit in those pews—you that really believe in Jesus, and receive this bread and wine in perfect contentment, saying within yourselves, "It is well. It is all well. It is well from beginning to end—

from top to bottom. Being justified by faith, I have peace with God. The peace of God that passeth all understanding doth keep my heart and soul by Jesus Christ." Come. If you have never enjoyed it before, enjoy it to-night, and do not be afraid. If you go to the devil's feasts, put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite, for you may soon eat and drink and be drunken. Solomon is the author of this prudent advice. But when you come to the feasts of love, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved. There never was a Christian man that was too happy in God. There never was a believer that was too peaceful, too serene, too confident, too hopeful. You cannot drink too much of this heavenly nectar. Oh, that you would but have grace to take in all that you *may* have! I know what you will do. You will come to-night into my Lord's treasury, and he will say, "Take what you will." There will be mints of gold and silver before you, and you will look all round and take up some brass farthing or other and say, "Bless the Lord for this!" Such gratitude is right enough. Bless the Lord for anything. At the same time, why not take something better? "Oh, I have been a mourner," you say, "all my days." Whose fault is that? "Oh, but I have never had any great light or any great joy." Whose fault is that? Is it not your own? The Lord seems to me to say to-night even to the elder brothers here, "Rejoice and be glad." I do not think that many grumblers come to the Tabernacle, but there are certain grumpy elder brothers that are apt to say, "Neither at any time transgressed I thy commandments, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. I never have any joy. I am a regular seat-holder and a member. I go to the communion; I do all I can; but I never get any of these holy raptures and spiritual delights. These reformed thieves and converted rascals when they are converted seem to monopolize all the music and the dancing. I never have a dance to myself at all." But the father was in such a blessed humour that night that he did not even upbraid the elder brother; but he said, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. If you have had no kid wherewith to make a supper for your friends, why did you not take it? All that I have is thine." Come in, dear elder brother, as well as you younger ones, and let us eat and drink and be merry this night in the name of him who, having been the King of righteousness upon the bloody tree, is now to-night the King of peace upon his glorious throne; who upon this table shows you how he wrought out perfect righteousness, breaking his body and pouring out his blood for you, and now bids you come and see how all this is wrought for your peace, for his flesh and blood are now your bread and wine to make you glad. Wherefore, rejoice in the Lord! and again I say, Rejoice! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews vii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—397, 393.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

BEFORE DAY-BREAK WITH CHRIST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 14TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils."—Mark i. 35—39.

A WONDERFUL day was closed and crowned by a wonderful evening. Capernaum had been exalted to heaven that day, for deeds worthy of heaven had been wrought in her. Within the synagogue the power and authority of the new Teacher had been seen; but at the close of the Sabbath, when the people felt more free to lay their sick before him, his divine majesty was glorified of all in the open streets of the little town. Galilee had never before seen such a day of preaching, or such an eventide of healing. "At even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils." Surely this day was worthy to take a front rank among "the days of the Son of man." A very wonderful evening! Did not they think it so who had long grown to their beds, but suddenly found themselves walking, and leaping, and praising God? Those must have thought it so who beheld their pining relatives restored to health and vigour. Even devils must have felt it to be so, as they fled pell-mell into the deep. Assuredly the people of the city must have been greatly excited; on the house-tops, in the market, and in every lane and alley, the one theme of talk must have been the new Rabbi, his strange teaching, and his unrivalled miracles. After our Lord's sermon in the synagogue he held an inquiry-meeting in the street,—he had no other assembly-room. There he led them to look to him and obtain healing; and as this went on, crowds of persons were present confessing what the Lord had done for them. One might be content to die after being present at such a scene.

After that evening was over, and men went home, they said, "It was a very extraordinary occasion. What new teaching is this? What

power is this? We have never seen its like." It was a day from which to date an era: heaven and earth and hell were all affected by it. That pure teaching opening the mystery of the Kingdom, that healing energy setting forth the power of the redeeming King! No wonder that all tongues were fluent, and all lips eloquent, when there was so divine a subject to enlarge upon. Children and unlettered peasants could repeat the chronicle of that day of grace. They needed not to expatiate, much less to exaggerate; for in truth it was a heavenly day, and grew even brighter as the shadows fell. Those evening hours were as the hands of mercy, all bedecked with rings and jewels of heavenly charity: love was then in her bridal attire, and miracles were the bespangled ornaments of her beauty.

Do you not think that the wonderful evening was followed by an equally wonderful morning? That Sunday morning, as we now call the first day of the week, was it not equally notable? Remember the grand excitement of the day and its long eventide, and then observe the hallowed devotion of the coming dawn. The Preacher and Miracle-worker had been wrought up to a high pitch, and we should not have wondered had he needed lengthened rest; but instead thereof we read, "Rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."

Jesus has taken such necessary sleep as he desired, and he wakes. It is still dark, and all the inmates of the house are asleep. He very quietly and noiselessly steals out of the chamber, and finds his way into the street; and you see him go along alone till he has quitted the narrow roadway, and reached the open fields. The gloaming of the morning has hardly come: the dawn is scarcely grey. It is "a great while before daylight," and the darkness hangs all around with its friendly veil. But he knows his way: he had been adown those streets healing the sick: and out in the open he is at home, for he is acquainted with solitude, and the lines upon the face of sleeping nature are familiar to him. He turns to the most solitary hillside. Yonder is a hollow; he who enters that recess is quite out of sight. Jesus has passed into that hidden place, and there, in the darkness, he kneels: he cries: he supplicates: he speaks with God: he prays. Is this his rest after a toilsome day? Is this his preparation for coming labour? It is even so. That early morning of prayer explains the evening of power. As man he had not possessed that wonderful power over human minds if he had not perpetually communed with God. And now that his day's work is done, and the marvellous evening is over, all is not ended—a life-work still remains before him, and therefore he must pray. He feels a needs-be that there should be more marvellous evenings—that there should be further displays of power, and therefore the Great Worker draws nigh again to the source of strength, that he may afresh gird up his loins for that which lies before him. Dear friends, there is always a connection, even if we do not see it, between that great crowd on Sunday, and the pleadings of the saints;—a most intimate connection between the flocking converts of the ministry and those secret prayers which follow and precede it. There is such a connection that the two cannot be parted. God will not send great blessings in the way of open conversion if secret prayer be neglected. Let the preacher or the church forbear to

pray, and God will forbear to bless. Ay, and after conversions, unless there be again special prayer presented by the Lord's servants, much that looked like blessing may turn out to have been but the semblance of it, and future blessing may be withheld. If I could impress my heart on every syllable, and baptize every word with my tears, I could not too earnestly entreat you to be above all things earnest in prayer.

I delight to think of our Lord as praying before he did a great thing: it was his custom so to do. Perhaps the early morning prayer of our text preceded the Sermon on the Mount. I am not quite sure about that fact, though certain of the writers of Harmonies are assured of it; but I am quite certain that this special supplication followed an evening of miracles; and it seems to teach us that when God is with us, we should have more anxiety than ever to keep him with us. When the blessing has really come, and souls are being saved on all sides, then we are to redouble our cries to heaven, that the merciful presence may be retained and enjoyed to a still higher degree. Fresh from the wonderful successes of that miraculous night, the Christ of God goes on the Sunday morning to open the gates of the day with the uplifted hands of his prayer. Prayer should be our companion at all times. Pray when you are pining for a blessing; pray when you have newly obtained a blessing.

Now, we shall look at four points of our Saviour's character as we see them in these few verses. Let us hear the melody of four of those golden bells which adorn the garments of our great High Priest. First, we are caused to observe,—*Prayer by him intensely esteemed*; secondly, *popularity weighed in the balances and lightly valued;* thirdly, *practical duty followed out,* for when they said, "All men seek for thee," he said to them, "Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth." The fourth point is well worthy of attention. Here it is,—*preaching always to the forefront with him.* Whatever he does not do, he does preach; and, though he works miracles such as casting out devils, he evidently regards all bodily cures as subsidiary to his main work. "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth." We shall put the four things altogether, and see how the prayer and the preaching hang upon one another, and how the despising of popularity is fitly conjoined with the intense purpose to carry out his life-work.

I. First, then, let us think a little about our Lord in his private intercourse with the Father: PRAYER—HOW INTENSELY IT WAS ESTEEMED BY HIM!

He rose up that week-day morning early, and retired to a solitary place to pray, *to teach us not to keep our religiousness for Sabbath days,* or retain our prayerfulness for one day of the week. Many Jews in Christ's day said, "We have been to synagogue"; and when going to synagogue was over their religion was over too. At this day we are surrounded by persons whose godliness is circumscribed within the four walls of their synagogue, their church, their tabernacle, or whatever else they like to call it. Religion means to many the observance of certain ceremonials at stated times. They put on different clothes, and tread another floor, and then their religion begins. Do they put on different garments on the Sabbath because they are different men, or,

because they wish to be thought so? There is such a thing as a Sunday religion, and he that has it will be lost. The religion which only lives in our religious assemblies, how can it serve our turn? Shall we be in the meeting all the week? Shall we die in the place of worship? In all probability we shall die in our beds at home, and therefore we need a household godliness. Prayer on Sunday is well enough, but better far is the supplication which continually waits upon God. Our Sabbath prayer should abound; but the week days equally need prayer, and should be saturated with it. Grace is for streets and shops as well as for sanctuaries. It is well when God rules our thoughts as much in the shop as in the prayer-meeting—when we are as much under the governance of our Lord Jesus Christ when we are busy in the family as when we are sitting in the church of God. Oh, let us see to this! Our Master gives us a good example here. It was not upon the Sabbath morning that he woke so early: it was on the first day of the week, not yet rendered sacred by his resurrection, that our Lord quitted his couch, and wended his way through the shadows to find a place for fellowship with the Father.

You observe that in his prayer *he desired very much to be alone;* he was anxious that his prayer might not be seen of men. Woe unto that man whose devotion is observed by everybody, and who never offers a secret supplication. Secret prayer is the secret of prayer, the soul of prayer, the seal of prayer, the strength of prayer. If you do not pray alone, you do not pray at all. I care not whether you pray in the street, or in the church, or in the barrack-room, or in the cathedral; but your heart must speak with God in secret, or you have not prayed. "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." The less prayer is observed on earth, the more it is observed in heaven. That which is carefully concealed from men is seen of the Father.

I suppose, too, that our Lord loved to be alone *that he might pray aloud.* It is not necessary to pray with the voice: it is sometimes highly undesirable that you should pray aloud; but yet, as a rule, you will find it greatly advantageous to yourself to use your voice as well as your mind in prayer. I speak what I have often proved. I am accustomed to pray without uttering a single sound; but I find a relief and a stimulus in occasionally "crying aloud." In a lone spot where I shall not be heard, I find it an intense delight to pour out my heart aloud, using words and exclamations whereby the spirit expresses itself with freedom and force. I think that the Saviour, who was intensely human, felt much rest in the unrestrained pouring out of his heart and soul before his Father. He was supremely human as he was certainly divine; and I do not doubt that it was a comfort to him to arouse the hills with his praises, startle the glens with his groans, and put a tongue into every bush and tuft by his strong cryings and tears. All nature was akin to him, and the desert places were meet chambers for his great soul, wherein as in his own house "the holy child Jesus" might speak with the Father face to face. I commend to you who would attain to high communion with the Eternal that, as often as you can, you get so far afield as to be able to pray aloud, and use the

unrestrained voice in prayer. "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O God." David continually speaks of crying with his voice unto God. It is not essential; but it is often helpful.

Our blessed Master desired to get alone because there he would feel free to express himself—*to tell out his very secrets to the great Father.* His prayers in solitude! They must have been marvellous communications. How familiar with God, and yet how lowly! How simple, yet how spiritual! How full! How deep! How intense! Perhaps you have desired that they had been recorded; but you need not that I remind you that the world itself could not have contained all the books that might have been written. Be grateful for those that are written, and believe that infinite wisdom is as much displayed in the concealment of a part of our Lord's life as in the publication of the rest of it. Perhaps those prayers of his were such as we might not hear. Every saint pleads at times in forms of passionate petition which nobody else should hear but God; when we are quite alone we may dare to say things which might seem too venturesome for any other. I am glad that we have not many of Luther's prayers, for I conceive that the great bold German often said things to his God which a common Christian might not dare to say. That which was perfectly reverent in him might have savoured of presumption if you or I had ventured upon it. That which the Lord accepted from Luther, whom he had placed in so singular a position, and constituted in so remarkable a way for his work, might have been offensive if spoken by another. The Master's prayers were a free, outspoken talk with the Most High: his heart was open to the Lord as yonder river to the shining of the moon above it.

Certainly, our Lord Jesus Christ rose up early and went alone in the dark to pray, because *he loved to put prayer first of all.* He would go nowhere till he had prayed. He would attempt nothing till he had prayed. He would not cast out a devil, he would not preach a sermon, he would work no cure, however necessary, however profitable, until first of all he had drawn near to God. Take thou good heed unto thyself, my brother, that thou follow the same rule. Look no man in the face till thou hast seen the face of God. Speak thou with none till thou hast had speech with the Most High. Go not to thy labour with thy loins ungirt with the girdle of devotion, lest thou fail therein. Take not thou to running till thou hast in prayer laid aside every weight, lest thou lose the race. We cannot, we must not, think of entering upon a day, or upon an enterprise, without first saying, "Bring hither the ephod: let us ask counsel of the Lord!" We can do nothing without our God; let us attempt nothing without him. So the Saviour rises a great while before day, and gets alone with his God, that for him prayer might perfume the morning's dew, and sweeten the first breath of the dawn.

There was about the Saviour an intense desire to meet with God—to commune with the Father. Herein there is a living likeness between his prayers and ours; but yet his devotions must have been very different from ours, because he had no sin to confess as we have. A large part of our communion with God must lie in our confession of sin, in our expression of personal weakness, and in our pleading the righteousness of our divine Redeemer. But this blessed One had no sins to own before the Most High, and no weakness to lament, for in him was neither sin

nor tendency thereto. I can conceive that much of his devotion was shown in converse with the Father, when his blessed mind, for ever in agreement with the mind of God, spoke to God, and God revealed himself to him. Intimate intercourse must have been the main ingredient of the Saviour's prayers. Some of the sweetest devotion Christians ever enjoy does not lie in asking anything of the Father, but in the enjoyment of the Father himself. Two friends in closest intercourse do not spend their time in mutual explanations, and setting things straight, nor even in asking favours of each other; but they proceed to heart-to-heart converse, known only to those who have enjoyed the like. *We* are always in need, and therefore our daily devotion must consist largely of petitions; but yet we are by divine grace the children of the Lord, and the child says many things to his father beside that which takes the form of a request. Have we not with joyful reverence told our heavenly Father how we love him? How we long to be more like him? How we desire to serve him? That is how we talk with God alone: our heart is to the heart of God as the echo to the living voice which calls to it. The Saviour would tell out to the Father all his love to him, how he desired nothing but the salvation of those whom the Father gave him, how he devoted himself to glorify his name in them; for they were his, and he was surety for them. All that the divine Jesus could and would say to his Father we may not endeavour to imagine. We could not be permitted to stand by and hear those solitary prayers, but they must have been something unique, worthy of the Sacred Persons who there held solemn dialogue. Yes, the great heart of Jesus swam in supplication as in its element, and in proportion as we become like him we shall be of his mind as to private prayer.

One said to me the other day what I have sometimes read, but I was especially shocked to hear it: she said, "I am so conformed to the mind and will of God that I do not need to pray." I answered in sad surprise, "I pray God open your eyes to see the delusion under which you are labouring, for the holy Lord Jesus Christ abounded in prayer notwithstanding his absolute perfection." That kind of perfection which leads a man to think that he does not need to pray is damnable. I will use no calmer word. I believe that the doctrine of perfection, as it is frequently taught in these fanatical days, will be the ruin of many a soul that holds it. Could you cease to pray you would cease to live spiritually. It is the very breath of your nostrils if you be a child of God; as to your being so perfect as to need no more prayer and watchfulness, you lie unto your own soul, as surely as you live. Instead of believing in your perfection, I pray God deliver you from so terrible a delusion. If you were perfect you would still need to pray. Nay, you would pray more than ever, and your life, like that of Jesus, would be steeped and saturated in prayer. Our Lord, because he was perfect, longed perpetually to draw nigh unto God.

"Oh," says one, "I live in the spirit of prayer, and therefore I do not need times and seasons for prayer." And do you think that Christ did not live in the spirit of prayer? Yet he must needs have his special time and place to pray. Do not fall under the injurious notion, that because your spirit cries to God in prayer all day long, therefore there must not be some season for more immediately coming into God's presence: if

you do thus imagine, I am afraid that it will prove a snare to your feet. The Lord Jesus Christ, who knew better than you do that the main thing is the spirit of prayer rather than the act of prayer, yet, himself retired into desert places to maintain the act and exercise of prayer. Be spiritual; be baptized into the spirit of prayer; but do not be deceived by the enemy who can spirit a duty away while we dream that we only spiritualize it. We had better preserve the very bones of prayer, the posture, time, and place, rather than let it all ooze away into an impalpable mental condition. God keep us prayerful. He will do so if he makes us like his dear Son.

Further, I want you to notice concerning our Lord's prayer that there can be no doubt that *in his prayer he prayed for himself.* Much of his prayer belonged to himself, and to himself alone. He was, we know, in one great instance, "heard in that he feared," and he was heard in many other things known only to himself. But our Lord also much abounded in *prayer for his disciples:* he took their cases one by one, and pleaded with the Father for them. Remember how he prayed for Peter—supplicating for him before he came into danger. He said, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee." The enemy had only reached as far as the desire; but the Good Shepherd was quicker than the wolf, and had already interceded: "but I have prayed for thee." Christ had outstripped the devil; he had already prayed before the temptation came; and here on earth, as a father in the midst of his children, he took care that none of them should be in danger through the lack of his loving intercession.

And do you not think that he was praying, too, at that time, *for the sinners that were round about him?* It is his wont in heaven to make intercession for the transgressors; and I am sure that he did it here below. As he looked into those faces in the streets of Capernaum, he read the stories of their sin, and these came back to his memory amid those lone hills. He knew more about men than we do, for he could search their thoughts; he knew how foolish they were, and how far they had gone aside from God; and so in the silence of the desert he prayed with wide knowledge and profound sympathy, and he spake with the Most High in eager pleadings for those whose sins he measured, and whose doom he foresaw. To do his people and the world the grandest service in his power till he should lay down his life, our Lord stole away amid the heathery hills or the stony heaps of the shores of Galilee.

Dear friends, take care that you pray. Need I say it? Take care that you use all aids to prayer, such as being alone and rising early to pray. If your Lord needed prayer, you do much more require it. Take care that you pray much in the time of your success. Do not think that because of the wonders God did for you last night you are not to pray in the morning; but set double guard over your spirit in the moment of rejoicing, lest you be carried away by pride.

"Oh," say you, "but my prayers are so often disturbed!" I know it. The devil is sure to send somebody to knock at the door when you want to be quiet in prayer. Your Lord can sympathize with you in that, for Simon and they that were with him followed after him, and disturbed the solitude which he had sought with so much care. Simon was always to the front, and sometimes mischievously so; and here he

is leading the way in disturbing his Master: do not wonder if Satan finds a Simon to worry *you*. But as your Lord knows what it is to be disturbed, he can help you to bear up under disturbances, he can cheer you when these interruptions distress you, and he can aid you to renew your pleadings when the chain of your prayer has been broken.

I regret that I can say no more on that point, because my time has fled.

II. Only just a word or two, in the second place, upon POPULARITY PROPERLY WEIGHED by the Saviour.

The disturbance that came to the Saviour's prayer arose out of the desire of his disciples to tell him that everybody was after him; and, according to Luke's account in his fourth chapter, the people of the town were close on the heels of the disciples, to pray him not to go away, but to stop and be their Prophet, and heal their sick.

Our Lord's popularity was of the best kind; it had not been gained by any arts or tricks, nor by pandering to their pride, nor by yielding to their prejudices. He had preached nothing but the truth, and he had wrought no miracle among them for the mere sake of display, but only for their good. Yet he did not care for the best of popularity. He did not think it worth the having for its own sake, and therefore he shunned it to the utmost. His popularity could be used, and he did use it: for when the people came together he preached the gospel to them; but applause had no charms for him. He knew what poor stuff it is—of what gas it is made. He knew how uncertain it is—how like the wind it will veer round in no time. He knew that it might prove dangerous; and it did prove dangerous, for they sought by-and-by to make him a king.

Even his disciples would, if they could, have turned him from his spiritual purpose. Poor hearts! They wished to see him honoured, but they did not know that honour from men would have brought no honour to him. When they told our Lord, "All men seek for thee," he did not take notice of it; but proposed to go elsewhere and preach the gospel. Oh, dear friends, if ever you succeed in Christ's kingdom, bless God for your spiritual success, but do not think much of the approbation which follows upon it. Pass it over in silence, as though you heard it not. What is human approbation? What can it do for you? "When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants." If we have done anything good no credit is due to us, but only to the Lord, whose grace has made us to be his workmanship. If the Lord Jesus Christ, who preached by his own authority and power, and who wrought miracles really by his own might, yet fled away as much as he could from the applause of men, much more let each one of us do so. Oh, to walk before the Lord, and be blind and deaf to all the censures and the plaudits of the poor creatures around us! I have seen men whom God has greatly blessed, who have been highly honoured by their brethren, and yet they have been cast down, and have therefore been made to lie low in their own esteem. On the other hand, I have observed others whose usefulness in the church has not appeared to anybody but themselves, and yet they have been so tall that they almost needed St. Paul's Cathedral to stand upright in: their self-esteem has been ten times taller than the esteem of their wiser brethren. Let us prefer to

be found among the useful and lowly, rather than among the self-conceited and useless. God will not greatly bless us if we grow great. We may soon become too big to be used to win souls. I notice that soul-winning is generally accomplished by humble instruments. It is a delicate task, and the Lord who does it will not use those who are great, and strong, and mighty in their own esteem. When the Lord finds his servants lowly, like the Lord Jesus Christ, then they shall be used. The longer I live the more do I see that, as a rule, pride is the death of all true spiritual usefulness. As you love God, and would desire to honour him by a useful life, put far from you the temptation to sip of the intoxicating cup of human honour. Draughts of worldly glory are not for the priests of the Most High.

Though not in the Saviour's case, yet in ours, there is a close connection between our prayers and our being kept humble before the Lord. It is remarkable how kindly our neighbours watch over our vineyards in that respect. They are all in a fraternal flutter for fear we should grow vain: it is very good of them, but we do not wish them to rob themselves for our advantage. "Ah, sir," said a good lady to me one day, "I pray for you every day that you may be kept humble!" She was a wonderfully fine-looking woman, and splendidly dressed, and therefore I replied, "Thank you much; but you remind me of a failure in my duty. I have never prayed *for you* that you might be kept humble." "Dear sir," she cried, "there is no need for such prayers, for I am not tempted to be proud." How proud she was to have attained to such a delusion! When anybody says, "I am not tempted to be proud," shrewd common-sense suggests that it is time to wake up, lest the enemy get a fatal advantage over the vain spirit. When there is much prayer, abundant prayer, and drawing near to God, then the greatest success can be borne without risk. Prayer ballasts the ship, and so when God fills the sails with a prosperous wind the vessel is not overborne.

III. Notice, thirdly, how our Lord put aside all the dangers of popularity by setting before us PRACTICAL DUTY FOLLOWED OUT.

They said, "All men seek for thee." I think that most of us would have replied, "Well, then, let us go down and talk to them." But Jesus cries, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also." Instead of desiring honour, he shuns it; yea, he leaves no space for it, for he occupies each hour with a new labour. *He will break up new soil:* old harvests only serve to fill the basket for new seed-sowings. He will go *to encounter other trials* as soon as the first are overcome. When he enters a place for the first time, there is opposition, and Jesus is eager to face it. For him there remained no love of ease, no resting upon laurels already won. His nobly impatient spirit cries, "We have done something for Capernaum; let us seek fresh fields and pastures new." He will also *enlist assistance,* and rouse others to share in the Holy War. How condescendingly the Master puts it! He says, "Let *us* go." "O divine Master, all men seek for *thee.*" And the answer is, "Let *us* go into the next towns." He lifted his poor disciples into the *us* with himself. Because they are through the rest of life to be associated with him in his holy work, he takes care that in the first flush of his success they shall be brought to the front in con-

nection with himself. They will feel how unworthy they are to be in such high fellowship; they will admire his condescension in putting them there; and they will be the more ready to go on with him, taking their full part in evangelizing the other villages and towns.

Our Lord is thinking of the whole business; it is all before his mind's eye, what he is to do personally, and what he is to do through each one of them. The practical duty of doing his part of the work, and using them for their part of the work, is strong upon him. With a quick eye he sees, not what has been done, but what is to be done; not what God has given, but what God will still give in answer to the prayer which he has prayed; and he expects that it will be so large that he will want all his followers to help him in the process of ingathering it. So he says, "Let *us* go into the next towns." He does not say, "Let us rest and be thankful," but he obeys the secret instinct which drives him forward to be doing more and more of good to the sons of men. He feels within his soul that imperial *must* which every now and then crops up in his story as it is told by the evangelists. He is under a necessity to do the Father's will in blessing the sons of men, and all else is as nothing to him: "Therefore came I forth," says he. The errand for which he came forth evidently presses him, constrains him, impels him, and he must go forward till all his baptism is accomplished. His purblind disciples cry, "All men seek thee; stay in Capernaum;" but he thinks of the myriads who do *not* seek him, but need him more than those who do. Let his zeal for the unseeking multitudes inflame our hearts, and let us in enthusiastic chorus sing concerning the lost sheep—

> "O, come, let us go and find them!
> In the paths of death they roam;
> At the close of the day 'twill be sweet to say,
> 'I have brought some lost one home.'"

Jesus seemed to say, "Come you with me, and I will lead the way, for therefore am I sent, that all over Galilee and Judea I may wander after wandering souls, and give them health of body and salvation of spirit." This absorption in his life-purpose is one great evidence and accompaniment of our Lord's perfect spiritual sanity. He could not repose in work done, for the work which remained drove him ever onward. I say not that the Master could possibly have gloried: he never did glory —never would have gloried with any sinful pride; but in your case and mine the way to keep from ever glorying in what we have done is to think of what we have yet to do.

> "Forget the steps already trod,
> And onward urge thy way."

You know what the general said when one of his officers rode up and cried, "Sir, we have taken a standard." "Take another," cried he. Another officer salutes him, and exclaims, "Sir, we have taken two guns." "Take two more," was the sole reply. This way lies the reward of holy service:—you have done much, you shall do more. Have you won a soul? Win another. Did you bring fifty to Christ? Bring fifty more. If you have been faithful in little, you shall be entrusted with much. What is all we have accomplished compared with the

necessities of this immeasurable city, compared with the needs of our nation, compared with the desolated condition of the world? Brethren, in the hour of success resolve on wider labour. Go forward. Press on. Go to other cities. Attempt other methods of service; for therefore came you forth from God.

IV. Now I must close—compelled to do so by the incessant ticking of the clock—when I have noticed how the Lord Jesus Christ in all things makes us see PREACHING PUT TO THE FRONT; for he says, "Let us go into the next towns, *that I may preach* there also: for therefore came I forth." It is refreshing to hear preaching spoken of without a sneer. "The Pulpit is a worn-out piece of furniture," so they say. Printers have quite annihilated preachers: the few of us who survive may as well go home to our beds. Well, I am not going to speak of any excellence in preachers, or stand up for my brethren as though we were the wisest of all men. Suppose I confess that we are a set of fools? This is nothing remarkable: we always have been so. But it remains still written in Scripture, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Such is our folly that we are fools enough to go on preaching after our critics have decided that we belong to the dead past. Notwithstanding all that the wise men tell us about our day being over, we shall keep to our marching orders, "Go ye into all the world, and preach!" In that day when stock shall be taken of results, and judgment shall be according to equity, it will be found that the preachers of the gospel have, after all, with all their imperfections, been the great instruments in the hands of God for bringing in his people to eternal salvation. The people are supposed to read books in these times of the School Board, and therefore they do not need living speech. We are glad that the people should read, and much of what they read which is best worth reading was first heard from the pulpit. We know of no rivalry between the word printed and the word preached: it is often the self-same thing. But I reckon that the most of you who have been converted to God, will say that it was not what you read, but what you heard which was used of the Holy Ghost for your conversion. When heart speaks to heart with accents of emotion, it is somehow different from the paper. Some brethren read their sermons, and I do not condemn them, but I know that the most of people feel a kind of chill creeping over them as they hear the leaves rustle. It may be a prejudice, but I know that nine out of ten are numbed by the foolscap and the reading; I confess I feel the influence myself: a read sermon usually freezes me to the marrow, or else makes me fidget upon my seat.

When a warm heart speaks to an earnest ear it proves itself a suitable means for the transmission of blessing. The man bears witness better than the paper can. He speaks what he does know; and he throws a tone, a force, a light, a vigour into what he says which the printing-press cannot possibly communicate to the page. I know you grumble at the dulness of preachers, and I do not wonder at it; but I believe that the improvement of that matter lies much with yourselves. You shall find, I believe, that when more attention has been paid to the ministry, when you have prayed more for students, and when more care has been exercised in churches that only the right kind of men shall be helped into the ministry, the preachers of the word will rise into higher

rank in your esteem. When, instead of a man's being set apart for a minister because his father has a living to give him, or because he cannot pick up a subsistence anyhow else—when, instead of the power of simony and patronage, men only shall be introduced into the ministry who are really moved by the Holy Ghost; then the dishonour will be wiped from the pulpit, and it shall be seen to be the tower of the flock, the castle of the truth. We preach Christ crucified, and preach it because we are commanded to preach it, and we are well assured that wisdom is justified of her children. God's grand means of preaching the gospel, which the Lord Jesus followed so closely, is used for the sure accomplishment of eternal purposes.

I leave that point, because I want to say this much more: it is the praying man that is the right preaching man, and if any of you long to do good to your fellow-men, you must begin on your knees. You cannot have power with man for God until first you have power with God for man. Solitary prayer was the equipment for the Prince of preachers when he came forth among the crowds; it is the best equipment for you also. In solitary vigil buckle on the armour of light. Workers for God, I do entreat you to be abundant in supplication, that if success comes you may not be elevated unduly by it, that if non-success comes you may not be depressed unduly by it. Come what may, having prayed, it is yours to continue steadfast in present duty, still doing that for which you were sent, and still believing that the gospel of Jesus will prevail. Oh, my comrades, may the Lord uphold us even to the end!

As for you here present who never pray, *what will become of you?* As for you who, instead of preaching, do not care to hear preaching, what can become of you? If the Lord Jesus Christ went out to pray so early in the morning, do you know what he was praying for? Why, for the salvation of sinners like you, that you might be saved. His cries and tears were for those who neither plead nor weep for themselves. When Jesus stood up to preach, what had he on his mind but the salvation of sinners like you? Shall he think of you, and will you not think of him? Oh, look to him! See how he loves sinners! Now that he has been dead and buried, and has risen again, and gone into his glory, he still lives to save sinners! Look to him! Trust him! To-night, seek him in solitary prayer, and he will meet with you. To-morrow morning rise up early, "a great while before day," if you have no other means of being alone, and cry to him for mercy, and he will set heaven's gate open before you, and answer you even as his Father answered him.

The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark i. 29—45.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—340, 262, 250.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

RECRUITS FOR KING JESUS.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 17TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And there came of the children of Benjamin and Judah to the hold unto David. And David went out to meet them, and answered and said unto them, If ye be come peaceably unto me to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you: but if ye be come to betray me to mine enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it. Then the spirit came upon Amasai, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee. Then David received them, and made them captains of the band."—1 Chronicles xii. 16—18.

AT this time David was in the hold—I suppose in the stronghold of Ziklag, which the king of the Philistines had given to him. It was in that fortress-town that he received a welcome addition to his band. David was an exile; and it is not every man who cares to cast in his lot with a banished nobleman. He was outlawed, and his sovereign would have slain him with his own hand if he had found opportunity: few care to stake their all with a man in such a condition. The many who were on Saul's side spoke very bitterly of David, and, wishing to curry favour with the king, they slandered him to the blackest degree: few respectable people care to associate themselves with a person who is in ill-repute. Many to whom he had done no ill were eager to betray David, and sell him into the hand of his enemy; for men sought their own gain, and cared not whom they sold, so long as they clutched the price: it was no small thing for a band of men to unite with a man upon whose head a price was set. David had to stand upon his guard, for traitors were all around: the men of Keilah would have delivered him up when he went in all simplicity of heart within their gates. The fortunes of David were at a low ebb, and hence when these men came to David they did a valorous action—an action which he would be sure to remember in the after-days of his triumph.

I want to run a parallel between the case of David and that of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the present moment our Lord Jesus, the Son of David, is still in the hold. Among the men of this world he is not yet enthroned: their hearts go after another prince, and as yet the kingdom has not come to the Son of David. I know that he reigns in heaven, and that he is in very deed King of kings and Lord of lords;

but before the eyes of the mass of men he is still despised and rejected. His people, as yet, are but a feeble folk, and often hard put to it; while his kingdom is ridiculed, his claims are derided, and his yoke is scorned. The doctrines which he preached are tossed to and fro like a ball; and men at the present time are glorying in science or tradition, in reason or in speculation; yea, they speak as if human wisdom would soon wipe out the very name of Christianity. It is not so in truth before God; but it is so in appearance before men. This is an age of blasphemy and of rebuke for our Lord the King. Brave are they who will stand to Christ in this, the day of his exile. They shall be right royally rewarded who will now take up his cause, and will go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach. He is the man for the Lord Jesus who can now run the gauntlet of miles of scoffers, and be willing to be called a fool, a madman, or an idiot for his name's sake. Blessed are they who are not ashamed this day to bear the name of Christ written out large; and to confess that, after the way which men call "orthodoxy," so worship they the Lord God of their fathers. The philosophic Christian may escape if he will drown the Christian in the philosopher; but this is not to stand out square for Christ. It does our heart good nowadays to meet with a few brethren who are not ashamed still to believe in the merit of the Redeemer's precious blood, and in the power of his Spirit to regenerate. We feel at home when we drop in with a few who believe in prayer, and expect the Lord to interpose on the behalf of his people. I say, blessed are they who, like these men of Benjamin and Judah, are willing to go to the King in the hold, and take up his cause though it be at a low ebb, and stand up for him when the many are ready to trample him down, and are ridiculing his work and his cause. For my own part, I never loved my Lord better than now that he is defamed; and his truth is all the dearer to me because it is flouted by the worldly-wise.

It is to those who will volunteer for Jesus that I am about to speak; and our first head is, that using the text as a parable we have here *a commendable example*. It is a commendable example for men to join themselves with Christ while he is at a discount. Secondly, here is *a cautious inquiry*. When David sees these men come he does not at once receive them with open arms, but there is a reserve about him till he has asked them a question or two. He wants to know who they are before he writes down their names in his muster-roll. And, thirdly, here is *a very cordial enlistment* as they answer to his question, and say, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse; for thy God helpeth thee."

I. First, then, here is A VERY COMMENDABLE EXAMPLE. May the Holy Spirit lead many of my dear hearers to follow it.

Many of these men of Benjamin and Judah, in the first place, went to join themselves to David because *they had heard that he was the Lord's anointed*. They understood that Samuel had gone down to Ramah, and, in the days of David's youth, had anointed him in the name of the Lord to be king instead of Saul. Therefore they said, "Whom God anoints we will follow," and they came after David. It was fit that they should be loyal to David if they would be obedient to God.

Now, it is within the belief, I trust, of all assembled here, that the Lord God Almighty has anointed "one chosen out of the people" to be his King in Zion—the King of his church for ever and ever; and that one chosen out of the people is Jesus of Nazareth, of the house of David, who is himself, as man, the servant of God, but who is also divine, and counts it not robbery to be equal with God. We have, I trust, all of us drunk in this doctrine, that the Lord Jesus is the Anointed of God, the very Word of God, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Now, it seems to me that if it be so, the next inevitable step for men who fear God is to go forth and follow the Lord's Anointed. If Jesus be the Messiah, the sent One of God, in the name of everything that is gracious and right let us follow him. God has given him to be a leader and a commander to the people; let us rally to his banner without delay. If the Lord has anointed Jesus to be a prince and a Saviour, let him be our prince and our Saviour at once. Let us render him obedience and confidence, and openly avow the same. Our Lord puts it thus—"If I tell you the truth, why do ye not believe me?" The argument is irresistible with true-hearted men. If any of you believe that Jesus is anointed to be the Saviour of men, I say that you are unreasonable if you do not practically accept him as such. But if you are willing to come right straight out, and say, "Let others do as they will; as for me, I will be the loving servant of the anointed of the Lord"; then you act rightly, and render a reasonable service. What better argument can I find with just and reasonable persons than this? You believe that God has anointed Jesus, therefore accept him for yourself. If these men followed David because God had anointed him, infinitely more binding is it upon you and upon me, believing that God has anointed Jesus of Nazareth to be the King, for us to follow *him*, that we may be found faithful to his cause and kingdom. Oh, my dear hearers, I am perplexed about some of you: you call Jesus Lord, and yet you do not obey him; you own that he is the Saviour, and yet you do not trust in him for salvation. Do think this over, and may the Holy Ghost lead you to a sensible decision. If Jesus be God's anointed, led him be your beloved.

Next, these men, no doubt many of them, followed David because of *his personal excellencies*. They had heard of him—of what he was in his youth, what he had been at home, and at court, and in the army, and in the day of battle. He had behaved admirably everywhere, and these warriors had heard of it. I should not wonder if some of them remembered that, when he was a youth and ruddy, he came forth with his sling and stone and smote the giant foe of Israel on the forehead. Perhaps they had heard of all his mighty acts that he did when, as Saul's captain, he went in and out before the host and did valiantly in the name of the Most High. And when they heard of his gentleness, and of his courtesy, and of all the many virtues which adorned him, making him so greatly different from those leaders of freebooting bands who were so common in that land, I do not wonder if they enthusiastically gave themselves up to be the loyal followers of this David the son of Jesse. A good soldier should have a good captain: a good captain deserves good soldiers. These men of war argued well when they enlisted under David. But how shall I commend the Lord Jesus

Christ to you that are of a noble spirit? Was there ever any like unto him? Who among the good, the great, the brave, the beautiful, can be likened unto him? He left the courts of heaven that he might save men. Love brought him from glory to be the Redeemer of his enemies! Being found in fashion as a man, he gave himself up to death, even the death of the cross for love of men. All his life long he did valiantly for the Lord his God, in all holiness and righteousness, defeating every temptation and overcoming all evil, and he ended his labour by going up to the cross to enter into personal duel with death and hell, therein overthrowing all the powers of evil on the behalf of his people. Oh, could I paint his face, and could you see it as it is beheld by the eyes of God, you would all be enamoured of him! Oh, could all men know how good he is, how gracious he is, as some of us do know; even if they only went to that partial extent, surely no men would stand out, but the Prince Immanuel would win all hearts! All these young men and all the vast multitude who gather to this Tabernacle would gladly take up their cross, and follow after Jesus at once, if they had any idea of his surpassing excellence. O my soul, how wouldst thou rejoice if men would come at once to Jesus! Oh to hear you all say, "We also will be with Jesus in the day of his derision and his scorn; for we see what he is, and there is none like him. He shall be our King and our Captain, for he is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely." He, being such a One, and so worthy of the anointing which he has received of God, I do as his recruiting sergeant commend him to every one here. Oh, that you would all become his true followers at once; for he deserves the love and loyalty of every one of you. If ye would be safe and happy, come to my Lord, and be henceforth his servants. If ye would fight a good fight, enlist beneath this glorious "Captain of our salvation."

There was a third reason why brave spirits resolved to enlist under David, and that was, that he was so cruelly persecuted by Saul—*so misrepresented and abused by his enemies.* There are some cringing, fawning spirits in this world, who must always go with the majority. What everybody says they say: they take their cue from those who lead the fashion of the hour. They ask leave of common custom to breathe or eat. They dare not swallow down their spittle till they have obtained permission so to do. Cringing, fawning sycophants of all that is great, and all that is fashionable, scarcely could a soul be found in them if they were searched through and through with a microscope. These will never come to David when he is in the hold, nor need he wish that they would. On the other hand, there are brave spirits who rather prefer to be in the minority. They do not even care if they have to stand alone for truth and righteousness. They could have ventured to say with Athanasius, "I, Athanasius, against the world"; for they know the right and they cling to it; and it is not to them a question whether truth walks in silver slippers or whether she plods barefoot through the mire. It is the truth they care for, and not the habiliments with which she may be adorned or disfigured. Such men took up David's side chivalrously because it was the right side, and the despised side; and they liked it none the less because so many spake evil of it. Sadly true is it that the Lord Jesus Christ is still of so little

account in this world. His name, ah, I am sick of the way in which they use his name to-day! Shame on some that are called Christian ministers! They believe in Christ, but it is a Christ without his crown, his atonement, his judgment-seat, or even his Godhead. They mock us with orthodox phrases, from which the essential truth is gone. They pretend that they believe in the atonement, and when we listen to their atonement we find that it does not effectually atone for any one. It is a mere fiction, and not a fact. It saves nobody, but is a mere sham. They have eviscerated the gospel, and then they hold up the empty carcase, and claim that they are Christians still. Christians who have murdered Christianity! Believers who doubt whether there is anything to be believed! Yet we are entreated in our charity to hug such traitors to our bosom. We shall do nothing of the kind. We would sooner believe in infidels outright than in those who pretend to be Christians and are infidels at heart. "Modern thought" is a more evil thing than downright atheism; even as a wolf in a sheep's skin is worse than a wolf in his natural form. There are pretty things said of our Lord Jesus by those who deny the faith which are sickening to me. I loathe to hear our true Lord praised by false lips. They deny the doctrines which he taught, and yet prate about believing *him*. It is a shallow trick, but yet it deceives shallow souls. Poor, weak minds say, "The man speaks so beautifully of Jesus, surely he cannot be in error." I tell you it is the old Judas trick—the Son of man is betrayed with a kiss. How nauseating their praises must be to him whom they are betraying. Think not that they are honest; their designs are far other than appear upon the surface. They laud him as man that they may dishonour him as God: they cry up his life, and his example, that they may cast his atoning sacrifice into the ditch. They lift up one part of the divine revelation with no other intention than that they may dash down the other: they crouch at his feet that they may stab at his heart.

I avow myself at this hour the partisan of Christ, and of the whole truth of Christ, in its old-fashioned form: the more old-fashioned the better for me. I am for Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. I am for the gospel of martyrs and confessors who gave their hearts' blood as the seal of their faith. New gospels and new theologies I abhor. I am for that same ancient gospel which to-day is said to be absolutely defunct. Science has wiped out the evangelicals: we are dead: we are gone. So they say of us. Yet in our graves we turn: even in our ashes live our wonted fires: we expect a resurrection. Truth may be crushed down, but it cannot be crushed out. If there survived but one lover of the doctrines of grace he would suffice by God's Spirit to sow the world again with the verities of our holy faith. The eternal truth which Christ and his apostles taught is not dead but sleepeth; at a touch of the Lord's hand she shall rise in all her ancient power and look round for her adversaries, and they shall not be: yea, she shall diligently consider their place and they shall not be. Blessed are they who at this time are not afraid to be on the side that is ridiculed and laughed at. Truth will have its turn, and though it now grind the dust it shall be at the top before long, and they who are loyal to it shall share its fortunes. Let us be bold enough to say, "Put down my name among the fools who believe, and not among those whose wisdom lies in

doubting everything." God save us from the wisdom which believes in itself, and give us more of the wisdom which believes in *him!*

Once more. These men came to David because *they believed that David had a great future before him.* He was very poor when they came to him, an exile, as we have said, an outlaw, one who could not return to his land because the king himself had a personal feud with him. But they said, "It doth not yet appear what he shall be. This son of Jesse will be king yet, and his enemies shall beg their lives of him." So, looking to the great future that awaited him, they determined to take shares with him in his present low estate that they might be raised with him in his exaltation. Now, I think that I can say to every one here, "I would that ye would come over to David's side—to Jesus's side—for there is a future awaiting him, a glory, a triumph, even here on earth, such as shall make those men gnash their teeth who throw away this opportunity of enlisting in his host." How will souls lament for ever their neglect of joining themselves to Jesus! It shall be their everlasting regret that they lost the opportunity of standing straight out for truth, and right, and love, as they are seen in the person of the Son of God. Oh, it will be an endless loss to have refused to stand upon the pillory of scorn, and avow Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. "Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him." Woe to those who pierced him by refusing to believe in him. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever, and the shout of "Hallelujah, hallelujah," shall come up from earth and descend from heaven. He shall sit upon the throne of his father David, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Who does not desire to be with him and to behold his glory? Cast in your lot with him, then, O ye undecided! Let his cause be as it may in the eyes of worldlings, espouse it at once right heartily; for they that are with him in his humiliation shall be with him in his triumph.

Those are the reasons why, at this time, I stand here, and exhort, beg, beseech, entreat every one among you to be on the side of Jesus Christ our Lord. Woe unto you if you turn your backs upon him! Woe unto you if you attempt to be neutrals! Woe unto you if you are lukewarm followers! Remember, he that is not with him is against him. He that takes not up his cross and follows not after him is not worthy of him, and shall not be counted among his disciples. Oh, that this whole company here to-night were distinctly and avowedly, perfectly and continuously, on the side of Jesus Christ, the Prince of peace, the coming King! O my friend, yonder, I speak to you personally, I would to God that you would at once put on the livery of my Lord Jesus, and become his sworn servant for ever!

II. Now, I have just a few words to say upon the second head. A CAUTIOUS INQUIRY.

These men of Benjamin and of Judah came to David, and David met them as a warrior standing upon his guard. The times were not such as to allow of a negligent confidence in all who professed friendship. The Benjamites were of the same tribe as Saul, and it was singular that they should come and join with David, the rival of their own leader. The men of Judah belonged to the same tribe as those men of Keilah who had betrayed David: therefore the hero was cautious and made careful inquiry. My Lord Jesus Christ is never so eager after

disciples as to enrol those who cannot bear to be questioned. He did not go abroad sweeping up a heap of nominal followers who would increase his apparent strength and prove a real weakness to him. He said to those who offered themselves, "Count the cost." "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," says one. Jesus does not there and then enlist him, but calmly replies, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He wants followers, but he wants them to be of the right kind; therefore he does not delude them and excite them to enter suddenly upon a course which they will, before long, renounce. He does not act as, I am afraid, the recruiting sergeant does when he tells the brave boys of all the glories they will enjoy, and crosses their hands with a shilling, so that they may take Her Majesty's money and become her servants. The sergeant does not say much about the wounds of battle and the pains of hospital: he does not dwell very long upon wooden legs, and broken arms, and lost eyes, and all that. No; he dwells on pleasure, victory, pension, glory. Our great Captain does not in this manner entrap allies, but he sets the worst part of his service first, and bids men consider whether they will be able to carry out that which they propose to do. I would in this matter imitate my Lord: I have pressed you to come to his banner, but at the same time I would cautiously inquire of you.

Now, see what David said to them: he set before them *the right way*. He said, "If ye be come peaceably *unto me* to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you." If you wish to join with Christ's people, and have your name numbered with them, one main question is—Do you come unto *him?* Do you first give yourselves to the Lord and afterwards unto his people? "If ye be come *unto me*," says David. It would have been useless for them to answer, "We have come because we are fond of some of the people that are with you." "No," he says, "if ye be come *to me*, then my heart shall be knit to you. Not else." Do you come to Christ, dear friend? Are you sure that Jesus is your Leader? Do not profess to be a Christian if you have not come to Christ, for Christ is the soul of Christianity. To come to Christ is this: confessing your sin, look to him as the sin-bearer, trust him with your future, trust him with your soul altogether. By a sincere, simple, undivided faith, you do really come to Jesus: have you such a faith? Let Jesus Christ be first and last with you. Take him to be your Saviour altogether. Do not be your own Saviour even in part. Let him save you from beginning to end, from top to bottom, in all ways and respects. If it be so, come along with you, for our host will be glad to have its number increased by your coming. If you do not thus come to our Lord, pray do not come to us, for you will neither do good, nor get good thereby.

Then David puts the question, "If ye be come *peaceably* unto me," and this was needful, for some are captious and quarrelsome. Some profess to come to Christ, but they quarrel with Christ at the very first. They would make terms with him, and they come intending to dispute with his people. From the first they are discontented and fault-finding, rather patronizing Christ and his cause than humbly uniting with him and his people. They do not think half as much of God's people as God thinks of them. When I hear people say, "Oh, there is So-and-So,

who is not what he ought to be, and he is a member of the church," and then they begin finding fault with this and with that, I say to myself, "That critic is no true friend." The church is not perfect, but woe to the man who finds pleasure in pointing out her imperfections. Christ loved his church, and let us do the same. I have no doubt that the Lord can see more fault in his church than I can; and I have equal confidence that he sees no fault at all, because he covers her faults with his own love—that love which hides a multitude of sins; and he removes all her defilement with that precious blood which washes away all the transgressions of his people. I dare not find fault with those whom the Lord has loved from before the foundation of the world; more especially since I find that I need all my time to find out my own faults and to get rid of them. If you are a faultless man I do not ask you to join the Christian Church, because I am sure that you would not find anybody else there like yourself. It is true that if you do not join a church till you find a perfect one you will not be a church-member this side heaven; but I may add, that if there were such a church, the moment your name was written in the list it would leave off being a perfect church, for your presence would have destroyed its perfection. If you are coming to pick holes, and quiz, and question, and find fault, and talk about inconsistencies and so forth, then you may pass on and join some other army; but if you be come peaceably to our Lord and to us, then I offer you a hearty welcome. We are not anxious to enlist men who love to have the pre-eminence, nor men of fierce temper, nor unforgiving spirits, nor proud, envious, lovers of strife: we want only those who have the mind of Christ. Come peaceably, or come not at all.

Again David puts the question, "If ye be come peaceably to me *to help me.*" Mind this and mark it well: they that join with Christ must join in his battles, join in his labours, join in his self-sacrifice. We must come to his church not only to be helped, but to help. It is of no use your entering the army if you do not mean to fight; and it is of no use your uniting with the host of God unless you mean to take your share in the holy warfare. Many forget this, and look upon a religious life as one of sanctified selfishness. A great many stop the gospel plough. "Hi!" say they; "stop!" They want to ride on one of the horses. Yes, but the ploughman has no opinion of such friends. Let them lead the horses or hold the plough-handles, or do something, or else let them take themselves off. Of course, I do not mean the sick and faint; but all fit for war must go to the war. There is something for every church-member to do as well as to receive. They that join the Church of Christ must come to pull as well as to be pulled—come to work as well as to eat; and usually the rule is true in Christ's house as it ought to be in everybody else's, "He that will not work, neither shall he eat." They that do not labour in the cause of Christ will very soon find that they are not fed in the house of God. Why should they be? I count it no office of mine to carry bread and meat to sluggards and lie-a-beds: I would sooner feed swine. They who never do a hand's turn among us ought to be turned out from us. If ye be come peaceably to help us, then I speak for my Captain, and bid you welcome; but if you do not mean real service, please to march on.

There are the three questions, then. Do you come to Christ and accept him? If so, come along. Do you come with a desire to maintain peace among your Christian brethren? If so, come! Do you come with the intent of helping the Lord Jesus Christ to spread abroad his truth? Then come, and welcome, and the Lord be with you and with us!

Do you know what Jesus says to you who come to him aright? "My heart shall be knit unto you." Oh, I think that if I had been Amasai, I should have felt the spirit come upon me to speak just as Amasai did when he so heartily declared that he and his brethren came to join heart and soul with David. With all that loving warmth which was so natural to him, David said, "My heart shall be knit to you." Now when the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Will you espouse my cause? Will you accept me for leader? Will you come and join with my people? Then my heart shall be knit unto you"—do not your hearts leap within you? What a charming promise it is! What union of soul it sets forth! I do not know much about knitting; but some of you do. Things knit together are not merely joined in one, but they are one. They are not merely sewn together by a machine, so that you can draw out a thread and the pieces divide; but they are knit together and are of one piece, one fabric, one substance. Come, then, ye truly faithful, you shall be knit together with Christ, his heart with your heart; you shall never be separated from him any more. It is a great thing when the hearts of God's people are knit together; but it is greatest of all when their hearts are knit with Christ's heart, and his heart is knit with theirs. Come hither, ye true-hearted: cast in your lot with your Lord. Is it not reward enough for coming into his host that his heart shall be knit to you? I count this my heaven upon earth, to have my Lord's love; do you not agree with me?

Notice how David put the other side of it, and set before them *the wrong way*;—"But if ye be come to betray me to my enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it." Will persons ever join the church to betray the Lord Christ to his enemies? I say not that such is their present purpose; but a great many have acted as if they were from the beginning traitors to him and to his truth. They have come into the church, and yet they have betrayed Christ to his enemies; yea, they have been aided in their treachery by having been admitted within our ranks. Some have done this by giving up the doctrines of the gospel. Falling into this error and that, they have denied the gospel, overthrown the weak, and shaken the strong. Some have proved themselves the enemies of the cross of Christ by their inconsistent lives. People have pointed at them, and said, "Those are followers of Christ, you see. They can lie, and cheat, and get gain as the basest rogues do." They say that they are Christians, and yet you cannot trust them in trade. They are just as gay, and worldly, and false as if they were not Christians at all. Why, then I suspect that they are not Christians at all; but like Judas Iscariot, they are children of perdition. Then there are some in all ages who betray the Lord Jesus by apostasy. They run well for a time, and then they are hindered. Being armed and carrying bows, they turn back in the day of battle. They are trees twice dead, plucked up by the roots. Such

sorrowful heart-breaking cases do occur in all churches, where men come to the very front, and appear to do great service for Christ, and yet forsake him, and walk no more with his people, nor in his ways; even denying that they ever were associated with him and with his cause. They open his wounds! They put him to an open shame! Woe unto them! Sorrowfully, yet sternly would I say, If there should be one here who will in some future day wilfully betray the Saviour on any account whatever, the Lord have mercy upon such, and prevent his joining with our church lest we be overwhelmed with shame and sorrow. True-hearted men, we invite you! Half-hearted, fickle men, we would avoid you! Yet such do come, and will come, and what can we say of them? "The God of our fathers look thereon and rebuke it,"—ay, rebuke it so as to prevent it, that they may not be as thorns in our side.

III. But time fails me, and therefore I must finish up, thirdly, by describing from the text A CORDIAL ENLISTMENT. The captain of these brave men felt the Spirit come upon him, and he spoke up as warm-heartedly as David had spoken, saying, "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace, be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee."

He began thus:—"Thine are we, David." Now, that is the first thing I want of those who are going to join the church—"Thine are we, Jesus. We are not our own; we are bought with a price." Well may that man avow himself to belong to Christ who has been bought with the blood of Christ: "For ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." Now, if ye be indeed redeemed by him, I pray you confess that you are altogether and absolutely your Lord's. Sing with your whole heart—

"All that I am, and all I have
Shall be for ever thine."

Do not sing it alone, but practise it. Let your lives say—Thine are we, Jesus. Neither count we anything that we possess to be our own; but all is dedicated to thy royal use.

Then Amasai added, "and on thy side, thou son of Jesse:" for, if we belong to Christ, of course we are on Christ's side, whatever that side may be. In religion, morals, politics, we are on Christ's side. Here is the side of the learned; there is the side of the ignorant: we are on neither the one, nor the other: we are on Christ's side. In every political question we desire to be and ought to be on Christ's side: we are neither of this party nor of that, but on the side of justice, peace, righteousness. In every moral question we are bound to be on Christ's side. In every religious question we are not on the side of predominant thought, nor on the side of fashionable views, nor on the side of lucre, but on the side of Christ. Make this your oracle—"What would Jesus do?" Go and do *that*. How would Jesus think? Go and think *that*. What would Jesus have you to be? Ask God to make you just *that*. "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse."

Then he added, "Peace be to thee." "Peace, peace, be to thee." Double peace to thee. So say we to our Lord Jesus Christ: our heart salutes him and invokes peace upon him. Blessed Master, we are at peace with thee so completely as to be at one with thee. What thou sayest we believe; what thou doest we admire; what thou commandest

we obey; what thou claimest we resign; what thou forbiddest we forego. We yield ourselves up to thee wholly, and are at perfect peace with thee in all thy purposes, and designs, and acts. Peace, peace, to thee.

"And peace be to thy helpers." We desire all good for all good men. We pray for the peace of the peaceful. The day that we were converted we felt that we loved every Christian. I used to say of the little village where I first preached, that I had such an attachment to every inhabitant in it that if I had seen a dog that came from Waterbeach I would have given him a bone. Do you not feel the same towards all the Lord's people? The proverb hath it, "Love me, love my dog;" and when you love Christ you love the very lowest of his people. Ay, if Jesus had a dog, you would love that dog for Christ's sake. I am sure that it is so. When a man is always cavilling, I fear he has not the spirit of Christ, and is none of his. We know some people who might he compared to hedgehogs, they cannot be touched by anybody, they are all spines and prickles; such people may think well of themselves, but it is to be feared that the loving Jesus does not think well of them. The man with a hot head and a bitter heart, is he a friend of Jesus? I cannot imagine that such a head as that will lie in Jesus Christ's bosom. Oh, no, dear friends; he that loveth is born of God, but not the man of hate and spite. Give me the eyes of the dove, and not those of a carrion crow. When the dove soars aloft into the air, what does she look for? Why, for her dovecote, and when she discovers the beloved abode she uses her wings with lightning speed, for there is her delight. If you were to throw a raven or a carrion-crow into the air, it would be looking for something foul which it could feed upon; and there are men and women in every Christian church who are always trying with far-reaching and greatly-magnifying eyes to find out some wretched scandal or another. If you want to go to your bed uncomfortable, and to lie awake all night, if you are a pastor of a church, have a few minutes' talk with a friend of this order. These are the folks who have just sniffed out a matter that ought to be inquired into. When it is inquired into there is nothing to discover, and great heart-burning is caused in the process of investigation. These same scandal-mongers will have something fresh to-morrow morning wherewith to keep their dear tongues going. May we be favoured with very few of these irritating beings. May those that come among us always be those that can say, "Peace be to thy helpers." Whatever helps Christ I would help. Wherever I see anything of Christ there my heart shall rest. Oh, to have a large increase to this church and all the churches of hearty, loving, peace-making people!

The last word that they said to David was, "For thy God helpeth thee;" and I shall keep that last sentence very much to myself: I want to feed upon it as my portion of meat: you must not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn, and I am that ox at this time. "Thy God helpeth thee." How I do rejoice to think that God is helping the Great Son of David. All the powers of the God of nature and providence are working to aid the Lord of grace. The stars in their courses are fighting for our Immanuel. Everything is being overruled for the advance of Christ's kingdom. We are all on the tremble as to the Soudan and Egypt; but could we see all things we should rejoice.

None of us know what is coming. I am no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I venture to foretel that mountains will be levelled for the coming of our Lord even by calamities and disasters. There will be a speedier dissolution of the empire of the false prophet and of the false prophet's imitator because of all this mixing up of the west and the east in an unwilling conjunction. I say not how or when, but the Lord's purpose shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. When the ocean roars at its utmost fury, the Lord puts a bit into the mouth of the tempest and reins up the storm. Jehovah maketh a way for himself amid the tumult of great waters. When confusion and uproar predominate everywhere, and old chaos seems to be coming back again, all this is but a phase of unbroken order. How swift and sure are the revolutions of the wheels which are bringing nearer the chariot of the Son of God!

Cast in your lot with "the Leader and Commander of the people," who has God with him. It is the glory of Christ's cause that the Lord God is involved in it. Mr. Wesley's dying words were, "The best of all is, God is with us!" As I repeat the truth my heart cries, "Hallelujah! Blessed be the name of the Lord!" The Lord thy God helpeth thee, O Christ of God! The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in thy hand. Thou must reign: thy Father swears it to thee. Thou shalt divide a portion with the great, and thou shalt share the spoil with the strong, for thou hast given up thy soul unto death, and permitted thy glory to be rolled in the dust; and thou hast risen and gone into the glory; therefore thou must reign. O Anointed of the Lord, thy throne shall endure for ever! To-night thy servants salute thee again, thou Son of David. Wounded Christ, we lay our fingers in the print of the nails, and say, "My Lord and my God." Risen Christ, we look upward as the heavens receive thee, and we adore. Ascended Christ, we fall at thy dear feet, and say, "Thine are we, O Son of David, anointed to be a Prince and a Saviour." Coming Christ, we wait and watch for thine appearing! Come quickly to thine own! Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John i. 29—51.

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PUTTING THE HAND UPON THE HEAD OF THE SACRIFICE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 16TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD."—Leviticus i. 4, 5.

No doubt there are clear distinctions in the teaching of the burnt offering, the meat offering, the peace offering, and the sin offering. In those various sacrifices we have views of our Lord's atoning work taken from different stand-points. On another occasion it will be profitable to note these delightful lessons and lay them to heart; but at this time I am not about to enter into such matters. These instructive distinctions are the special property of those who by reason of years have had their senses exercised, and therefore can discern not only the great work of our Lord, but the details of it. I am not sufficiently strong in mind at this time to bring forth "butter in a lordly dish" for men of robust constitution, but I must be content to serve the little ones with a cup of milk. I cannot carry the great cluster from Eshcol, and therefore I will bring you a few grapes in my trembling hand. I desire to preach this morning so that I may fulfil the prayer of a little boy who, one Saturday evening before he went to bed, said in his prayer, "Lord, grant that our minister may say something to-morrow that I may understand." I am very sorry that such a prayer should ever be necessary, but I am afraid it is not only needful for children, but sometimes for grown-up people to pray, "Lord, help our minister to say something that we can understand, and that is worth understanding." Some of my brethren appear to dwell on high Olympus among the clouds: it were better if they lived on Calvary. Little dew comes from the dark mountains of intellectual dreaminess; far more refreshing drops are found upon the Hermon of the gospel. I feel like Dr. Guthrie when he desired those around him to sing him a bairn's hymn; I would be a little child in preaching to you. Simple things are the most sublime, and to a sick man the most sweet. I wish to be plain as a pikestaff in setting forth the way of expiation by the death of Jesus.

I have a reason also for preaching foundation truth to-day which to

myself is powerful, though you may smile at it. It is this: If I have but few shots to fire, I should like each time to hit the centre of the target; that is to say, if I may only speak to you once to-day, after having been laid aside for three weeks, I desire to speak only upon topics which touch the vitals of godliness. I would plunge into the heart of the matter, and deal with the essence and soul of true religion. There are some things that may be or may not be, and yet no great evil will come either way; but there are other things that must be, or all goes wrong; of these must-be's I would now speak. Some things are important for the *well*-being of Christians, but certain other things are absolutely essential to the very being of Christians; and it is upon these urgent necessaries that I shall now speak—namely, concerning the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and our faith in it; for these two things are of the highest importance, and they cannot too often be brought before our minds.

Two matters were essential in the sacrifices of the ceremonial law; and you have them both in our text: "He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering," and "He shall kill the bullock before the Lord." The appropriation by the offerer and the death of the offering are most fitly joined together, and must neither of them be overlooked.

For our immediate object there was no need to have taken our present text, for there are many others of like effect. Look at Leviticus iii. 2: "And he shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering, and kill it at the door of the tabernacle." Glance at the eighth verse: "And he shall lay his hand upon the head of his offering, and kill it before the tabernacle." Turn to chapter iv. verse 4, the second clause of the verse: "He shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and kill the bullock before the Lord." As also at the fifteenth verse: "And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the Lord: and the bullock shall be killed before the Lord." To the same effect is the twenty-fourth verse: "And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering." All through the book of Leviticus the laying on of the hand and the killing of the victim are mentioned in immediate connection. These are each of them so important, and so full of meaning, that we must have a sermon upon each of them.

Let us on the present occasion look at THE LEADING ACT OF THE OFFERER: "*He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering.*" All that goes before is important, but this is the real sacrificial act so far as the offerer is concerned. Before he reached this point, the person who presented the offering had to make a selection of the animal to be brought before the Lord. It must be of a certain age, and it must be without blemish; and for this latter reason a careful examination had to be made; for the Lord would not accept a sacrifice that was lame, or broken, or bruised, or deficient in any of its parts or in any way blemished. He required an offering "without spot." Now I invite all those who seek reconciliation with God to look about them, and consider whether the Lord Jesus Christ be such an atoning sacrifice as they need and as God will accept. If you know of any other atonement for sin, examine it well, and I am persuaded that you will find many a fault and flaw in it; but concerning the Lamb of God, I have no

question; you may search, and test, and try, but you shall find no blemish in him. If there were any fault in him, either of excess or deficiency, you might well refuse him; but since there is nothing of the kind, I pray you joyfully to accept him at once. Come now and look at the Lord Jesus Christ, both at his Godhead and his manhood, at his life and his death, his acts and his sufferings, and see if there be any iniquity in him. He knew no sin: he had no acquaintance or dealing with it; "he was holy, harmless, undefiled." After you have well examined his blessed person and his spotless character, if you arrive at the conclusion that he is a fit and acceptable sacrifice for you to present before the Lord, then I long that you may take the much more practical step, and accept the Lord Jesus to be your representative, your sin offering, your burnt offering, your substitute, and your sacrifice. I long that every unsaved person here may at once receive the Lord Jesus as his atonement, for this is the main part of that which the sinner must do in order to be cleansed from sin and accepted of God. Happily you have not to find a sacrifice as the Jew had to supply a bullock; God has provided himself with a perfect sacrifice; that which you have to bring to God, God first brings to you. Happily, there is no need for you to repeat the examination through which the Lord Jesus passed both at the hands of men, and of devils, and of God, when he was tested and tried and examined, and even the prince of this world found nothing of his own in him. You have to attend to this one thing, namely, the laying of your hands upon the sacrifice provided for you. To the Jew it was a sacrifice to be slain, to you it is a sacrifice already offered; and this you are to accept and recognize as your own. It is not a hard duty: you sang of it just now—

> "My faith doth lay her hand
> On that dear head of thine;
> While like a penitent I stand,
> And there confess my sin."

If you have attended to this already, do so again this morning; if you have never done so, I pray from my inmost soul that you may immediately do that which was meant by laying the hand upon the victim's head.

I. To our work, then, at once. What did that mean? It meant four things, and the first was, CONFESSION. He that laid his hand upon the head of the offering made *confession of sin*. I do not care what offering it was that was brought by a believing Israelite, there was always a mention of sin in it, either implied or expressed. "But," says one, "the burnt offering was a sweet-savour offering, and how could there be any reference to iniquity therein." I know that the burnt offering was a sacrifice of sweet smell, and that it sets forth our Lord as accepted of the Father. But let me ask you, Why did the Israelite bring a sweet-savour offering? It was because he felt that in and of himself he was not a sweet savour unto God, for if he had been so he would not have needed to have brought another sweet savour. When I accept the Lord Jesus to be my righteousness it is a confession of sin, for I should not need his righteousness if I had one of my own. The very fact of presenting a sacrifice at all contains within it a confession of the need of a sacrifice, which is the confession of personal shortcomings, and a want of personal acceptableness. This is true of the burnt offering, but in other

sacrifices, especially in the trespass offering, where the hands were laid upon the victim's head, the offerer was charged to "confess that he hath sinned in that thing" wherein he had trespassed. There was a detailed confession of sin joined with the laying on of hands in the case of the scapegoat. Let us read the passage in Leviticus xvi. 21—"And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness."

See then that if you would have him to be your atonement whom God has appointed to be his sacrifice, you must come to him confessing your sin. Your touch of Jesus must be the touch of one who is consciously guilty. He belongs not to you unless you are a sinner.

Ah, Lord, confession of sin is no hard duty to some of us, for we can do no other than acknowledge and bemoan our guilt! Here we stand before thee self-condemned, and with aching hearts we each one cry, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness." Do any of you refuse to make confession of guilt? Then, do not think it hard if, since according to your own proud notions you are not sinners, the Lord should provide for you no Saviour! Should medicine be prepared for those who are not sick? Wherefore should the righteous be invited to partake of pardon? Why should a righteousness be provided for the innocent? You are the rich and you are sent empty away; the hungry shall be filled with good things. Go to; you that say, "I am clean; I am not defiled;" I tell you that you have no part in the great sacrifice for sin. For the blackest sinner out of hell that will confess his sin there is mercy; but there is none for you; your pride excludes you from pity: it bars the gate of hope against you. You sprinkle the blood of the lamb upon the threshold and trample on it in your arrogant self-conceit, by making yourself out to have no need of its cleansing power. O self-righteous man, you make out God to be a fool, since he gave his only-begotten Son to die, when according to you there was no necessity for his death. In your case at any rate there is no need of a sacrifice by blood, no need of an atonement through the Son of God laying down his life for men. By your refusal to trust in the Lord Jesus you charge God with folly; and therefore into his holy place, where his glory shines forth in its excellence, you can never come. Many of us come most readily at this time and lay our hand upon the head of the appointed sacrifice, even our Lord Jesus Christ, because we have sin to confess, and we feel that we need a Saviour, even a Saviour for the guilty. We are unworthy and undeserving. We dare say no otherwise. The stones of the street would cry out against us if we should say that we have no sin; the beams of every chamber in our house would upbraid us if we dared to assert that we are without transgression. Our true place is that of sinners: we plead guilty to the dread indictment of God's holy law, and therefore we are glad to lay our hand upon the head of the sinner's Saviour and sacrifice.

In this act there was also a confession *of self-impotence*. The believer who brought the bullock did as good as say, "I cannot of myself keep the law of God, or make atonement for my past breaches of the commandments, neither can I hope through future obedience to become acceptable

with God; therefore I bring this sacrifice because I myself cannot become acceptable without it." This is a truth which you and I must also confess if we would be partakers of Christ, and become "accepted in the Beloved." Oh, brethren, what can we do without Christ? I like what was said by a child in the Sunday-school, when the teacher said, "You have been reading that Christ is precious: what does that mean?" The children stayed a little while, till at last one boy replied, "Father said the other day that mother was precious, for 'whatever should we do without her?'" This is a capital explanation of the word "precious." You and I can truly say of the Lord Jesus Christ that he is precious to us, for what should we do, what could we do without him? We come and take him now to be ours because if he be not ours we are utterly undone. I for one am lost for ever if Jesus cannot save. There is in us no merit and no strength: but in the Lord Jesus Christ we find both righteousness and strength, and we accept him this day for that reason. Because we are so deeply conscious of our own self-impotence we lean hard upon his all-sufficiency.

If you could read the text in the Hebrew you would find it runs thus: "He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make a cover for him"—to make atonement for him. The word is *copher* in the Hebrew—a cover. Why, then, do we hide behind the Lord Jesus? Because we feel our need of something to cover us, and to act as an interposition between us and the righteous Judge of all the earth. If the Holy One of Israel shall look upon us as we are he must be displeased; but when he sees us in Christ Jesus he is well pleased for his righteousness sake. When the Lord looks this way we hide behind the veil, and the eyes of the Lord behold the exceeding glories of the veil, to wit the person of his own dear Son, and he is so pleased with the cover that he forbears to remember the defilement and deformity of those whom it covers. God will never strike a soul through the veil of his Son's sacrifice. He accepts us because he cannot but accept his Son, who has become our covering. With regard to God, when I am a conscious sinner I long to hide away from him, and lo! the Lord Jesus is our shield and hiding-place, the cover, the sacred atonement within which we conceal ourselves from justice. Even the all-seeing eye of God sees no sin in a sinner that is hidden in Christ. Oh, what a blessing it is, dear friends, when our sense of self-impotence is so great that we have no desire to make a show of ourselves, but on the contrary long to be out of sight, and therefore we enter into Christ to be hidden in him, covered in the sacrifice which God has prepared. That is the second confession, and thus we have a confession of sin and of need of covering.

There was a further confession of *the desert of punishment.* When a man brought his bullock, or his goat, or his lamb, he put his hand on it, and as he knew that the poor creature must die he thus acknowledged that he himself deserved death. The victim fell in the dust, struggling, bleeding, dying. The offerer confessed that this was what *he* deserved. He owned that death from the Almighty hand was due *to him.* And oh, when a man comes to that, when he owns that God will be justified when he speaks in anger, and clear when he judges and pronounces sentence in justice; when he confesses that he cannot deliver himself, but has

so sinned as to deserve to be accursed of God, and adjudged to feel the horrors of the second death, then is he brought into a condition in which the great sacrifice will be precious to him. Then will he lean hard upon Christ, and with broken heart acknowledge that the chastisement which fell upon Jesus was such as he deserved, and he will wonder that he has not been called upon to bear it. For my own part I deserve eternal damnation; but I trust in the Lord Jesus, and believe that he was punished in my stead. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." If you can thus confess sin, and bare your neck to punishment, and then lay hold upon the Lord Jesus, you are a saved man. Can your heart truly confess, "I am guilty; I cannot save myself; I deserve to be cast into the lowest hell; but I do now take Jesus to stand in my stead"? Then be of good cheer, "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace." May the Spirit of God bless this first point!

II. Secondly, the laying on of hands meant ACCEPTANCE. The offerer by laying his hand upon the victim's head signified that he acknowledged the offering to be for himself.

He accepted, first of all, *the principle and the plan.* Far too many kick against the idea of our being saved by substitution or representation. Why do they rebel against it? For my part, if God will but graciously save me in any way I will be far enough from raising any objection. Why should I complain of that which is to deliver me from destruction? If the Lord does not object to the way, why should I? Moreover, as to this salvation by the merit of another, I do remember that my first ruin did not come by myself. I am not speaking to excuse my personal sin, but yet it is true that I was ruined before I committed any actual sin by the disobedience of the first father of the race who was my representative. How this was just I do not know, but I am sure it must be right, or God would not so reveal it. In Adam we fell: "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom. v. 19). If, then, the fall began by the sin of another, why should not our rising be caused by the righteousness and the atonement of another? What saith the Apostle? "For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." At any rate, it is not for you and for me to raise objections against ourselves, but to feel that if God sees that this is a proper way of salvation, he knows best and we cheerfully accept what he approves. Who is there among you that will not do so? God grant that no one may hold out against a method of grace so simple, so sure, so available!

But, then, mind. After you have accepted the plan and the way, you must not stop there, but you must go on to accept *the sacred person whom God provides.* It would have been a very foolish thing if the offerer had stood at the altar and said, "Good Lord, I accept the plan of sacrifice; be it burnt offering or sin offering, I agree thereto." He did much more than that; he accepted that very bullock as his offering, and in token thereof placed his hand upon it. I pray you beware of resting satisfied with understanding and approving the plan of salvation. I heard of one who anxiously desired to be the means of the conversion of a young man, and one said to him, "You may go to him, and talk to him, but you will get him no further, for he is exceedingly well

acquainted with the plan of salvation." When the friend began to speak with the young man, he received for an answer, "I am much obliged to you, but I do not know that you can tell me much, for I have long known and admired the plan of salvation by the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ." Alas, he was resting in the plan, but he had not believed in the person. The plan of salvation is most blessed, but it can avail us nothing unless we believe. What is the comfort of a plan of a house if you do not enter the house itself? What is the good of a plan of clothing if you have not a rag to cover you? Have you never heard of the Arab chief at Cairo who was very ill and went to the missionary, and the missionary said he could give him a prescription? He did so; and a week after he found the Arab none the better. "Did you take my prescription?" he asked. "Yes; I ate every morsel of the paper." He dreamed that he was going to be cured by the plan of the medicine. He should have gone to the chemist's and had the prescription made up, and then it might have wrought him some good. So is it with salvation: it is not the plan, it is the carrying out of that plan by the Lord Jesus in his death on our behalf. The offerer laid his hands literally upon the bullock: he found something substantial there, something which he could handle and touch; even so do we lean upon the real and true work of Jesus, the most substantial thing under heaven. Brethren, we come to the Lord Jesus by faith, and say, "God has provided an atonement here, and I accept it; I believe it to be a fact accomplished on the cross that sin was put away by Christ, and I rest on him." Yes; you must get beyond the acceptance of plans and doctrines to a resting in the divine person and finished work of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, and a casting of yourself entirely upon him.

III. But thirdly, this laying of the hand upon the sacrifice meant not only acceptance, but also TRANSFERENCE. The offerer had confessed his sin, and had accepted the victim then presented to be his sacrifice, and now he mentally realizes that his guilt is by divine appointment to pass over from himself to the sacrifice. Of course this was only done in type and figure at the door of the Tabernacle; but in our case the Lord Jesus Christ as a matter of literal fact has borne the sin of his people. "The Lord hath made to meet on him the iniquity of us all." "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many."

But do we by faith pass our sins from ourselves to Christ? I answer, No: in some senses, *no*. But by faith he that accepts Christ as his Saviour *agrees with what the Lord did ages ago*, for we read in the book of Isaiah the prophet, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." That was Jehovah's own act in the ages past; and it was complete when Jesus stood as the great sin-bearer, and redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. All the transgressions of his people were laid on him when he poured out his soul unto death, and "was numbered with the transgressors, and bare the sin of many." Then and there he expiated all the guilt of all his people; for he "finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness." By his death he cast the whole tremendous load of human guilt, which was laid upon him, into the depth of the sea, never

to be found again. When we believe in him we agree to what the Lord has done, and so far we may sing—

"I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us
From the accursed load."

There are two ruling religions around us at this day, and they mainly differ in tense. The general religion of mankind is "*Do*," but the religion of a true Christian is "*Done*." "It is finished" is the believer's conquering word. Christ has made atonement, and we accept it as done. So in that respect we do lay our sins on Jesus, the holy Lamb of God, because we set our humble seal to that grand transaction which was the confirming of the covenant of old.

The laying of the hand upon the head of the sacrifice meant a transference of guilt to the victim, and, furthermore, *a confidence in the efficacy of the sacrifice* there and then presented. The believing Jew said, "This bullock represents to me the sacrifice which God has provided, and I rejoice in it because it is the symbol of a sacrifice which does in very deed take away sin." Brethren, there are a great number of people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ after a fashion, but it is not in deed and in truth, for they do not believe in the actual pardon of their own sin: they hope that it may one day be forgiven, but they have no confidence that the Lord Jesus has already put away their sin by his death. "I am a great sinner," says one, "therefore, I cannot be saved." Man alive, did Christ die for those who are not sinners? What was the need of a Saviour except for sinners?* Has Jesus actually borne sin, or has he not? If he has borne our sin, it is gone; if he has not borne it, our sin will never depart. What does the Scripture say? "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." If, then, Christ did take the sinner's sin, it remains not upon the sinner that believeth. Assuredly, you my hearer, if you be a believer, cannot have sin if Jesus has taken it away. You are made clean in the sight of God because your uncleanness has been washed away in the blood of the great sacrifice. See you not this way of salvation? If you do see it, will you not accept it now? Do you not feel already a joy springing up within your soul that there should be such a blessed way of deliverance? At any rate, I tell you where I stand to-day: I stand guilty, and without a hope in anything I have ever done or ever hope to do; but I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ bore my sin in his own body on the tree, and I am at this moment putting my hands on him in the sense in which the Hebrew has it, leaning with all my weight upon him. If Jesus cannot save me I must be damned, for I cannot help him, neither can I see any one else who can do so much as a hand's turn in that direction. If there be not virtue enough in the blood of Jesus to cleanse me from all sin, then I must die in my sins: and if there be not sufficient merit in his righteousness to save me apart from any righteousness of my own, then I am a cast-away, a spirit shipwrecked on the iron-bound coast of despair. But I have no fears, for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have

committed unto him until that day. Now I pray you, dear people of God, to lean on Jesus, and keep on leaning there. Oh, that you who as yet do not know Jesus may be brought to touch him by faith and to lean upon him by full reliance. In times of sharp pain, or great depression of spirit, or in seasons when death is near, you are forced to look about you to see where your foundation is, and what it is; and, believe me, there is no groundwork that can bear the weight of a guilty conscience and a trembling, tortured body, except this foundation—"the precious blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Jesus is the atonement: he is the covering: he is the refuge: in fine, he is our all and in all.

IV. Once more, this laying of the hand upon the head of the victim meant IDENTIFICATION. The worshipper who laid his hand on the bullock said, "Be pleased, O great Lord, to identify me with this bullock, and this bullock with me. There has been a transferring of my sin, now I beseech thee let me be judged as being in the victim, and represented thereby." Now consider that which happened to the sacrifice? The knife was unsheathed, and the victim was slain. He was not merely bound, but killed; and the man stood there and said, "That is me; that is the fate which I deserve." The poor creature struggled, it wallowed in the sand in its dying agonies, and if the worshipper was a right-minded person, and not a mere formalist, he stood with tears in his eyes, and felt in his heart, "That death is mine." I beseech you when you think of our blessed Lord to identify yourselves with him. See the bloody sweat is trickling down his face; that is for you. He groans, he cries, for you. Your sins deserved that you should sweat great drops of blood, and Jesus sweats instead. The Lord is taken prisoner and scourged; see how the red streams of gore flow down those blessed shoulders! He bears the chastisement of our peace. He is nailed to the cross; and we are crucified with him. By-and-by he dies; and we die in him: "we thus judge that if one died for all, then all died." Believer, you died there in Christ. When your substitute rendered to the law of God the penalty which it demanded, you virtually rendered it. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," and you have died, believer; you have paid the debt in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ whom by the laying on of your hands you have accepted to be your substitute. You know that story—it is a capital one, well worth telling a thousand times. In the great French war a person was drawn for a conscript, but as he could not leave his family, he paid a very heavy sum for a substitute. That substitute went to the war and was killed. After a time Napoleon called out the rest of the conscription and the man was summoned because he had been formerly drawn; but he refused to serve. He said, "No, by my substitute I have served, and I am dead and buried: I cannot be made to serve again." It is said that the question was carried up to the highest court, and laid before the Emperor himself, and the Emperor decided that the man's claim of exemption was a just one. He had fulfilled the conscription by a substitute; that substitute had served for life, and could not be called upon to do more; and therefore the person for whom he was the substitute could not further be summoned under that conscription. This sets forth our joy and glory; we are identified with Christ, we are crucified with him, buried with him,

and in him raised to newness of life. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live." "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

It ought to be remembered that we were identified with Christ in his passing under the wrath of God as a sin offering. If you read in this book you will find that the sin offering was burnt without the camp as an unclean thing; and so you and I were put without the camp long years ago as an unclean thing. That is over now, and we are at this hour no more cast out from the sight of God than Jesus is.

The burnt offering was consumed upon the altar as a sweet savour unto God; and in this also we are identified with Christ. We are now a sweet savour unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are accepted in the Beloved. We are joined unto the Lord, and there is no separating our interests from his, nor his from ours. Who shall separate us from the Christ of God for ever and ever? That is what the laying on of hands upon the beast meant. I trust, dear friends, you have known all this for years, and, if not, may you know it now.

If the Lord will enable me, I intend to enter into the second part of my text next Lord's-day morning; and for this time it will suffice for me to drive this one nail home. Oh, that the Spirit of God would fasten it in a sure place in your hearts! My soul's yearning desire is that each one of you may come at once and lay your hands on Christ by confession, acceptance, transference, and identification. Nothing short of such an act will suffice to give you salvation.

Now, suppose that the Jew, who went up to the tabernacle and to the altar, when he came there had been content to *talk about* the sacrifice without personally placing his hand on it. To talk of it would be a very proper thing to do; but suppose that he had spent all his time in merely discoursing about the plan of a sacrifice, the providing of a substitute, the shedding of blood, the clearance of the sinner through sacrificial death; it would have been a delightful theme, but what would have come of it? Suppose he had talked on and on, and had gone away home without joining in the offering, he would have found no ease to his conscience; he would, in fact, have done nothing by going to the house of the Lord. I am afraid that this is what many of you have done hitherto. You are pleased to hear the gospel, you take pleasure in the doctrine of substitution, and you know true doctrine from the current falsehoods of the hour: for all which I am very glad; but yet you are not saved because you have not taken Christ to be your own Saviour. You are like persons who should say, "We are hungry; but we admit that bread is a very proper food for men, besides which we know what sort of food makes bone, and what makes muscle, and what makes flesh." They keep on talking all day long about the various qualities of food: do they feel refreshed? No. Is their hunger gone? No. I should suppose that, if they are at all healthy, their appetite is increased, and the more they talk about food the more sharp set they become. Why, some of you here have been talking about the bread of heaven for years, and yet I am afraid you are no more hungry than you used to be. Do go beyond talking about Christ, and learn to feed upon Christ. Come, now, let us have done with talk, and come to deeds of faith.

Lay hold on Jesus, who is set before you in the gospel: otherwise, dear friend, I fear you will perish in the midst of plenty, and die unpardoned, with mercy at your gate.

Suppose, again, that the Israelite instead of talking with his friends, had thought it wise to *consult with one of the priests.* "Might I speak with you, sir, a little? Have you a little room somewhere at the back where you could talk with me, and pray with me?" "Yes," says the priest, "what ails you?" "My sin lies heavy upon me." The priest replies, "You know that there is a sacrifice for sin; a sin offering lieth at the door, and God will accept it at your hands." But you say, "I beg you to explain this matter more fully to me." The priest answers, "I will explain it as well as I can; but the whole of my explanation will end in this one thing—bring a sacrifice, and over its head confess your sin, and let an atonement be made. The sin offering is what God has ordained, and therefore God will receive it. Attend to his ordinance and live: there is no other way. Fetch your offering; I will kill it for you, and lay it on the altar and present it to God." Do you say to him, "I will call again to-morrow, and have a little more talk with you"? Do you again and again cry, "To-morrow"? Do you go again and again into the inquiry-room? O sir, what will become of you? You will perish in your sin; for God has not appointed salvation by inquiry-rooms and talks with ministers, but by your laying your own hand upon the sacrifice which he has appointed. If you will have Christ, you shall be saved; if you will not have him, you must perish; all the talking to you in the world cannot help you one jot if you refuse your Saviour. Sitting in your pew this morning, without speaking to me or any living man or woman, I exhort you to believe in Jesus. Stretch out your withered hand, God helping you, and lay it on the head of Christ, and say, "I believe in the merit of his precious blood. I look to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Why, man, you are saved as sure as you are alive; for he that layeth the hand of faith upon this sacrifice is saved thereby.

But I see another Israelite, and he stands by his offering, and begins *to weep* and groan, and bewail himself. I am not sorry to see him weep, for I trust he is sincerely confessing his guilt; but why does he not place his hand on the sacrifice? He cries and he sighs, for he is such a sinner; but he does not touch the offering. The victim is presented, and in order that it may avail for him, he must lay his hand upon it; but this vital act he neglects and even refuses to perform. "Ah," he says, "I am in such trouble, I am in such deep distress," and he begins starting a difficulty. You hunt that difficulty down, but there he stands, still groaning and moaning, and producing another difficulty, and yet another, world without end. The sacrifice is slain, but he has no part in it, for he has not laid his hand upon it, and he goes away with all the burden of his guilt upon him, though the sacrificial blood has reddened the ground on which he stood. That is what some of you do. You go about lamenting your sin, when your chief lament should be that you have not believed on the Son of God. If you looked to Jesus you might dry your eyes and bid all hopeless sorrows cease; for he gives remission of sins to all penitents. Your tears can never remove your sins; tears, though flowing like a river, can never wash away the stain of guilt.

Your faith must lay her hand on the head of the Lord's sacrifice, for there and there only is there hope for the guilty.

"But surely," says one, "that cannot be everything." I tell you it is so much everything that

> "Could your tears for ever flow,
> Could your zeal no respite know,
> All for sin could not atone,
> Christ must save, and Christ alone."

Jesus will only save those who accept him and desire to be identified with him. I would to God that you would delay no longer, but come at once and freely accept what God has provided! I know the devil will tempt you to look for this and to look for that; but I pray you look at nothing but the sacrifice that is before you. Lean on Jesus with all your weight.

Observe that the Israelite had to put his hand upon a victim which was not slain as yet, but was killed afterwards. This was to remind him that the Messiah was not yet come; but you, beloved, have to trust in a Christ who has come, who has lived, who has died, who has finished the work of salvation, who has gone up into the glory, and who ever liveth to make intercession for transgressors. Will you trust him or will you not? I cannot waste words; I must come to the point. John Bunyan says that one Sunday when he was playing the game of tip-cat on Elstow Green, as he was about to strike the cat with the stick, he seemed to hear a voice saying to him, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or wilt thou keep thy sins and go to hell?" This morning the voice from heaven sounds forth this question, Will you trust in Christ and go to heaven, or will you keep apart from him and go to hell? for thither you must go unless Jesus becomes your Mediator and your atoning sacrifice. Will you have Christ or no? I hear you say, "*But*"—O that I could thrust your "buts" aside. Will you have Christ or not? "*Oh, but*"—Nay, your "buts" ought to be thrown into limbo; I fear they will be your ruin. Will you trust Christ or not? If your answer is, "I trust him with all my heart," then you are a saved man. I say not you *shall be* saved; but you *are* saved. "He that believeth in him *hath* everlasting life." You know how our dear friend, Mr. Hill, put it the other night at the prayer-meeting. "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." "H-A-T-H,"—that spells—"*Got it.*" Very good spelling too. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you have eternal life in present possession; go your way and sing for joy of heart, because the Lord has loved you. Mind you keep on singing until you join the choristers before the eternal throne. The Lord save every person that shall hear or read this sermon, for Jesus sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm li.
Leviticus i. 1—9.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—395, 555, 51 (Part II).

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SLAYING THE SACRIFICE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 23RD, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD."—Leviticus i. 5.

YOU remember that last Sabbath day we spoke of two things vitally essential to a true sacrifice, and the first upon which we then enlarged was the laying on of the hands of the offerer upon the victim, by which he accepted it as his sacrifice, and made a typical transfer of his sin from himself to the victim.* Now, the second essential thing, of which we are to speak this morning, was this,—that the victim thus bearing the guilt of the offerer must be killed: its blood must be shed before the Lord; nothing short of its death by violence would render it an atonement for the offerer: "He shall kill the bullock." You will find this order continually repeated whenever a sacrifice is spoken of.

As I said on the last occasion, I feel great satisfaction in this time of my weakness in being permitted to speak to you about essential things. It was always a stigma upon the character of Caligula that he gathered his warriors, and fitted out his ships; and, when the people of Rome looked for some great addition to the empire by the vast naval expedition, he simply anchored his vessels near the sea-beach, and bade his legions advance upon the shore and gather shells and pebbles, and carry them home as trophies of their undisputed conquest. He trifled where he should have struggled; spent time and labour upon matters of no importance, and neglected the weighty business of his kingdom. We shall not do so to-day: we have nothing to do with shells and stones, we have to do with matters worth more than gold or pearls, things essential to eternal life, and vital to the salvation of the souls of men.

Neither have I this morning a controversial topic upon which to debate before you. However important controversy may sometimes be, we are glad to be away from its strife, and to consider a doctrine around which true believers gather in hearty unity,—a doctrine which must be taken for granted in the Christian church, which lies at the very root of truth, and in the very heart of true religion. Without

* "Putting the Hand upon the Head of the Sacrifice," No. 1771.

controversy, great is this mystery of godliness, that Christ manifest in the flesh must die for sin, or otherwise sin cannot be put away. You remember what the Greek said when he heard an old philosopher with hoary head and grey beard disputing upon how to live. "Goodness!" said he, "if at his age he is disputing upon that subject, when will he be able to practise his conclusions should he arrive at any?" Truly, I may say to you to whom I have so long ministered, if we are for ever to be learning and never coming to a knowledge of the truth, what will become of us? If we are to have nothing but questionable matters laid before us, when shall the time come for the actual possession and enjoyment of the blessings of the gospel? At this hour my theme is such that I speak to you without diffidence or hesitation. In this case "we believe and are sure." Concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, the great sacrifice for sin, it was essential that he should die; for only through the blood which he shed on Calvary for human guilt can there be preached among men the remission of sins.

"What can wash away my stain?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

"This is all my hope and peace—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
This is all my righteousness—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!"

May the Holy Spirit lay home the blood of atonement to our consciences at this time to the glory of God and our own peace!

I. Concerning the killing and slaying of the offering, our first point is that it was ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL. The pouring out of the blood of the victim was of the very essence of the type. The death of Christ by blood-shedding was absolutely necessary to make him an acceptable sacrifice for sin. "It behoved Christ to suffer." He could only enter into the presence of God with his own blood. He could not be the grain of wheat which bringeth forth much fruit unless he should die.

Remember that although there were important matters about the victim, yet nothing would have availed if it had not been slain. The Israelite brought an unblemished bullock, but the fact of its being unblemished did not make it an atonement for sin; no doubt, many faultless bullocks and lambs still fed in the plains of Sharon. If the most perfect animal had gone away from the altar alive it would have effected nothing whatever by way of atonement. It must be unblemished in order to be an offering at all; still, its perfections did not make it a sacrifice until it was killed. No matter what could be said of that bullock; it may have been the most laborious animal throughout all Israel; it may have dragged the plough to and fro, or even drawn the waggon loaded with the harvest; but that was nothing to make it a sacrifice for sin. It must die, and its blood must be sprinkled upon the altar, or else the offerer has brought no acceptable oblation. All its life and its labour would not satisfy.

Nor would it be enough to bring the bullock there and dedicate it to

God. Some animals which had been dedicated to the divine service were used in the drawing of the waggons which carried the sacred furniture through the wilderness; but they were not sacrifices for all that, neither did they avail for the bearing away of sin. It was indispensably necessary that the bullock should be without blemish; it was necessary that it should be voluntarily dedicated to God; but if it had not been killed, there would have been no presentation of an offering according to the divine law, nor any easing of the conscience of the Israelite. Even so, Jesus must *die:* his perfect nature, his arduous labour, his blameless life, his perfect consecration, could avail us nothing without the shedding of his blood for many, for the remission of sin. So far from his death being a mere adjunct and conclusion of his life, it is the most important matter connected with him; it stands in the foreground, it is the head and front of his redeeming work. We justly value him for his example, and for his living intercession; but in the business of atonement it is beyond all things needful that we view him as the Lamb slain.

Now notice that *this was expressly declared by God in the Jewish law-book in express words.* Kindly turn in this book of Leviticus to the seventeenth chapter, and there read in the eleventh verse, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." It is not the burning of the victim, it is not the flaying of it, nor the washing of it, it is the shedding of its blood,—that is to say, the taking of its life, which makes it an atonement for sin. I need not quote another Old Testament text, because this is so completely to the point, and so fully covers the whole of the ground. The atonement is not the animal itself, but the blood of the animal, which blood represents its life.

As to *the entire Scriptures,* they *teem with statements of this truth.* I will only call to your recollection a few prominent passages; to collect them all would be impossible. When a child doth gather flowers in the spring meadows when they are all golden with the kingcups, he fills his hand once, but he is almost persuaded to throw away what he has gathered that he may pluck yet more from the inexhaustible store around him; so do I feel that what I now bring before you might fitly be exchanged for another selection, ay, for many such, if time did not fail us.

In the Old Testament, one of the most instructive types of redemption ever given is that of the Passover lamb. When God was about to smite Egypt he promised to spare his people; and in order to their safety he bade each family take a lamb, and kill it, and sprinkle the blood upon the lintel and the two side posts of their door. Then they were to keep within the house till the morning, and the destroying angel should not touch so much as one of them. What is expressly said by God himself about this passing-over? Hear the words, and wonderingly drink in their teaching! "And when I see the blood, I will pass over you." There was never a fuller type of the redemption of Christ, I hardly think one so full, as that of the passing-over of Israel through the blood of the paschal lamb; but the essence of that passing-over is displayed to us in this sentence—"When I see the blood, I will pass over you." God's eye resting upon the evidence of a life having been taken instead

of the sinner's life, is the reason why he passes over the sinner, so that he does not die.

When Isaiah, the great evangelical prophet, spake concerning him upon whom the Lord laid our iniquity, he mentions his death as the main cause of his glorious reward. The last verse of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is the culminating point of the whole, and it runs thus: "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death." It is a wonderful expression: it shows that Christ must die, or else he could not achieve the victory for us, nor share the spoil thereof. He must pour out his soul, he must relinquish life, must pour it out lavishly, as though he possessed much of it: he must make it to flow like water gushing in a river from the smitten rock. This he must do voluntarily and without stint—"pouring out. his soul unto death" till none remained, and the bottom of the vessel was reached in death. It is clear that if he had not done this, he had done nothing; for the victory comes to him because of this; not because he kept his soul free from spot, not because he preached righteousness in the great congregation, not because of anything else which he did was he rewarded; but the victorious deed was that "he poured out his soul unto death." This is the verdict, not only of the Holy Ghost in the inspired prophecy, but also of all that dwell with God above, for they sing with sweet accord before the throne,—"A new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

In the New Testament the passages abound which set forth the doctrine upon which we are now speaking. Look at that passage in Hebrews ix. 12. . There we are told expressly, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." There is no remission by the life of Christ, no remission by the teaching of Christ, no remission by our repentance, no remission by our faith, apart from the shedding of the blood of Christ, by whom alone sin is put away. This is negative; but in this case the negative is as strong as the most positive statement could be; for if without shedding of blood there is no remission, then we see how all-important that blood-shedding becomes. If you desire a positive statement, a sentence rises to our lips at once—"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Observe, not the life, not the incarnation, not the resurrection, not the second coming of the Lord Jesus, but his blood, his death, the giving up of his life, is that which cleanseth us from all sin. This is that purging with hyssop whereof David speaks when he laments his sin, and yet looks to be made whiter than snow by the free pardon of his God.

This truth is the subject of all true gospel preaching. Do you not know how Paul puts it,—"The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God;" "for," he says, "the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified." It is not Christ in any other position, but Christ as crucified, Christ as made a curse for us upon the tree, that is the first and most prominent fact that we are called to preach among the sons of men. "In whom we have

redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Take away this substitutionary death of our Lord, and you have taken all away: without the death of Jesus there remaineth nothing for us but death; forget the Crucified One, and you have forgotten the only name by which we can be saved. Oh, that all of you would trust in him "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

My brethren, this is the cause of the saints being in heaven. In the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation, verse 5, we have the doxology, which begins, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Thus say all the glorified. Further on we are told concerning the saints, "They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." This is the true reading of the fourteenth verse of the last chapter of the Book of Revelation: "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city." Thus the passport to glory is the precious blood of Jesus. Access to God either on earth or in heaven is only by the blood of the Son of God.

Now and then we meet with some squeamish person who says, "I cannot bear the mention of the word *blood*." Such individuals will be horrified this morning: and it is intended that they should be. Sin is such a horrible thing that God has appointed blood to wash it away, that the very horror which the thought of it causes may give you some notion of the terrible nature of sin as God judges it. It is not without a dreadful blood-shedding that your dreadful guilt could by any possibility be cleansed. Sin-bearing, and suffering for sin, can never be pleasant things; neither should the type which sets it forth be pleasing to the observer. On great days of sacrifice the courts of the tabernacle must have seemed like a shambles, and fitly so, that all might be struck with the deadly nature of sin.

If it be so, that the blood of Jesus is mentioned in the songs of heaven, let it not be forgotten in the hymns of earth.

"To him that loved the souls of men,
And wash'd us in his blood,
To royal honours raised our head,
And made us priests to God;

"To him let every tongue be praise,
And every heart be love!
All grateful honours paid on earth,
And nobler songs above!"

The church militant is called upon continually to commemorate the blood-shedding. So often as we gather to the Communion Table we may ask the question, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" At the sacred table we show the death of our Lord until he come. He says to us in express words, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the

remission of sins." He bids you remember the blood as you drink of the fruit of the vine, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood." Take the blood away, and the communion of the Lord's Supper has gone; there remains nothing but the Popish mass which is so blasphemously called an unbloody sacrifice for the quick and dead.

Forget not that every person gathering to that table of communion is, if he be what he professes to be, a consecrated man, and how comes he to be so but for this reason—"Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price"? We are redeemed unto God by the blood of Jesus. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." It is the blood that makes you what you are, and the blood that permits you to enjoy what God has prepared for you; so that every way you see the absolute essentiality of the death of the great Sacrifice.

Here let us further consider that *death is the result and penalty of sin*—"The soul that sinneth it shall die." "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." "The wages of sin is death." It was meet that the Substitute should bear a similar chastisement to that which should have fallen upon the sinner. Our Saviour did not endure annihilation, for that is not the meaning of death: neither the first nor the second death should be so explained. Jesus was not annihilated, but he bore the pain, the loss, the ruin, the separation, the overwhelming which is intended by death. He was even forsaken of God, so that he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The penalty was death, and therefore Jesus was exceeding sorrowful even unto death; he laid down his life for us, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. The law demanded death, and death has fallen upon our great Covenant Head. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly."

There is great comfort to my soul in this; for if the Lord Jesus has paid the capital sentence nothing remains unpaid. "He that is dead is freed from sin;" that is to say, if the law has killed the man it can ask no more of him, he must be free from further charge of guilt. When the criminal has died he has suffered the last sentence of the law, and is now beyond its jurisdiction. Our Lord Jesus has died the just for the unjust, and as that which he has borne is nothing less than death, it must cover all that is due to sin.

> "He bore on the tree the sentence for me,
> And now both the Surety and sinner are free."

Since Jesus has died unto sin once, he dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him; he has borne the last and most far-reaching penalty of the law, and there can be nothing left upon the score. His atonement was a complete redemption. If you were in debt, and were bound to pay so much every month, you would be very grateful to a friend who should step in and pay several instalments for you; but if one of more liberal spirit discharged the whole amount your gratitude would be deep and overflowing. Let us rejoice that the Lord Jesus Christ has evidently by his substitutionary sacrifice put away, not a part and a portion of our sin, but the whole of it. By bearing death itself he has removed all our legal obligations, and has placed us beyond the reach of further demands. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being

made a curse for us." Now we may sing unto him who has removed our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west.

This death of Christ was absolutely necessary also for the clearing of the troubled conscience. An awakened conscience will never be quieted with anything less than the blood of the Lamb: it rests at the sight of the great Sacrifice, but nowhere else. A conscience smarting under a sense of sin is an unequalled fountain of misery. Let conscience once begin to scourge the sinner, and he will find it to be the most terrible tormentor out of hell. I do not know whether the prophet Isaiah was really sawn asunder by Manasseh, but we know that some of the saints suffered that torture; yet surely a saw that should gradually cut a man in halves from head to foot is a faint picture of what conscience can do when it begins to operate upon the mind with all its cutting force. What a divine atonement that must be which calms the storms of an accusing conscience and gives the soul a lasting peace. Some may trifle with their consciences, but where God is at work men dare not attempt it. The most important thing in the world to a sensible man is the condition of his own conscience: if that be restless he is in an evil case. Thomas Fuller in his quaint way tells us that he one day asked a neighbouring minister to preach for him, when he called upon a short visit. "No," said the other, "I cannot, for I am not prepared." "But," said Fuller, "though you are unprepared, I am sure you will preach well enough to satisfy my people." His friend answered, "That may be true, but I could not preach well enough to satisfy my own conscience." There's the rub with a true man. We cannot live well enough to satisfy our conscience, and we cannot pray well enough to satisfy our conscience. A really tender conscience is as greedy as the horse-leech which crieth "Give! Give!"—perfection it asks, and as we cannot render it by reason of sin, conscience will never cease its outcries till it is quieted with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Once let us see Jesus offered up upon the cross for sin, and our heart feels that it is enough. When God is well pleased we may well be satisfied, and go our way enjoying peace with God henceforth and for ever.

Thus much, then, upon our first point: for many reasons it was absolutely essential that our great Sacrifice should die.

II. Secondly, we will with great delight meditate upon the fact that the death of Christ is EFFECTUALLY PREVALENT. Other offerings, though duly slain, did nothing thoroughly, did nothing lastingly, did nothing really, by way of expiation; for the Scripture saith, "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins": the true purification is alone found in the death of the Son of God. When our Lord was fastened to the tree, and cried, "It is finished," and gave up the ghost, he had finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. By offering one sacrifice for sins for ever the work was done, the accusing record was altogether blotted out. Why was there such cleansing power in the Redeemer's blood? I answer, for several reasons.

First, because of *the glory of his person.* Only think who he was! He was none other than the "Light of light, very God of very God." He counted it not robbery to be equal with God, yet he took upon himself our nature, and was born of a virgin. His holy soul dwelt in a per-

fectly pure body, and to this the Godhead was united: "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Now for this glorious, this sinless, this divine person, to die is an amazing thing. For the Lord of angels, Creator of all things, sustaining all things by the power of his word—for him, I say, to bow his head to death as a vindication of the law is an inconceivably majestic recompense to the honour of eternal justice. Never could justice be more gloriously exalted in the presence of intelligent beings than by the Lord of all submitting himself to its requirements. There must be an infinite merit about his death: a desert unutterable, immeasurable. Methinks if there had been a million worlds to redeem, their redemption could not have needed more than this "sacrifice of himself." If the whole universe, teeming with worlds as many as the sands on the seashore, had required to be ransomed, that one giving up of the ghost might have sufficed as a full price for them all. However gross the insults which sin may have rendered to the law, they must be all forgotten, since Jesus magnified the law so abundantly, and made it so honourable by his death. I believe in the special design of our Lord's atoning death, but I will yield to no one in my belief in the absolutely infinite value of the offering which our Lord Jesus has presented; the glory of his person renders the idea of limitation an insult.

Next, consider *the perfection of our Lord's character.* In him was no sin, nor tendency to sin. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." In his character we see every virtue at its best; he is incomparable. If he therefore died, "the just for the unjust," what must be the merit of such a death? His righteousness has such sweetness in it that all the ill-savour of our transgression is put away thereby: it is no wonder that by the obedience of such an one as this second Adam many are made righteous.

Think next, dear friends, of *the nature of the death of Christ*, and you will be helped to see how effectual it must be. It was not a death by disease, or old age, but a death of violence, well symbolized by the killing of the victim at the altar. He did not die in his bed, sleeping himself out of the world; but he was taken by wicked hands, and scourged, and spit upon, and then fastened up to die a felon's death. His was a cruel doom; human malice could scarcely have invented any method of execution more sure to create pain and anguish than death by hanging on a tree, fastened by nails driven through hands and feet. In addition to his physical pain, our Lord was sore vexed in spirit. His soul sufferings were the soul of his sufferings: "He was exceeding sorrowful even unto death." Heaven refused its smile: his mind was left in darkness. To be frowned upon of God was a part of the punishment of our sin, and he was not spared that direst and bitterest woe. God himself turned away his face from him, and left him in the dark. He died a dishonourable death, yea, a cursed death—"As it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Now, for the Son of God to die, and die in such a manner, was a marvel. Never martyr died crying that he was forsaken of his God: that desertion was the lowest depth of the Saviour's grief, and since he died thus I can well understand that he has thereby made an ample atonement for the sins of all who believe in him. Oh, great atonement of my blessed Lord, my sins

are swallowed up in thee! Looking to the cross and to the pierced heart of Jesus my Lord, I am assured that if I am washed in his blood I shall be whiter than snow.

And then think of *the spirit in which our Lord and Saviour bore all this.* Martyrs who have died for the faith have only paid the debt of nature a little before its time, for they must have died sooner or later; but our Lord needed not to have died at all. He said of his life, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." The pouring out of his soul unto death was not in the power of man until the Lord was pleased to yield himself a sacrifice. "He gave himself for me." He laid down his life for his sheep. Out of love to God and man he willingly drank of the appointed cup: the only compulsion which he knew was his own desire to bless his chosen. "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame." Oh, it was splendidly lived, that life of our Lord; the spirit which guided it lights it up with an unrivalled brightness! Oh, it was splendidly died, that death of our Lord, for he went up to the cross with such willing submission that it became his throne! The thorn crown was such a diadem as emperor never wore, it was made of the ended sorrows of his people —sorrows ended by their encircling his own majestic head. On the cross he routed his enemies and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. In the act of death he nailed the handwriting of ordinances that was against us to his cross, and so destroyed the condemning power of the law. O glorious Christ, there must be infinite merit in such a death as thine, endured in such a style!

And then I bid you to remember once more *the covenant character which Christ sustained:* for when he was crucified we thus judge that one died for all, and in him all died. He was not slain as a private individual, but he was put to death as a representative man. God had entered into covenant with Christ, and he was the surety of that covenant; therefore his blood is called "the blood of the everlasting covenant." Remember the expression of the apostle where he speaks of "the blood of the covenant wherewith we are sanctified." Neither the first nor the second covenant was dedicated without blood; but the new covenant was established by no blood of beasts, but by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep. When he offered himself he was accepted in that character and capacity in which God had regarded him from before the foundations of the world; so that what he did he did as the Covenant-head of his people. It was meet that he should die for us, seeing he had assumed the position of the second Adam, being constituted our federal Head and Representative. The chastisement of our peace was upon him because he condescended to be one flesh with us; and with his stripes we are healed because there is a covenant union between us. Thus much upon the effectual prevalence of that great Sacrifice: a theme so vast that one might enlarge upon it throughout all time.

III. Beloved friends, it seems to me that no one will now forbid my saying, thirdly, that the fact of the necessity for the death of the Lord Jesus is INTENSELY INSTRUCTIVE. Listen while I repeat the lessons very briefly: you can enlarge upon them when you go hence to meditate in solitude.

Must the victims die? must Jesus bleed? then let us *see what is claimed by our righteous God.* He claims our life: he claimed of the offering its blood, which is the life thereof: he justly requires of each of us our whole life. We must not dream of satisfying God with formal prayers, or occasional alms-deeds, or outward ceremonies, or a half-hearted reverence. He must have our heart, and soul, and mind and strength—all that makes our true self, the life of our being. Dead works are worthless before the living God. He claims our life, and he will have it one way or another; either by its being perfectly spent in his service, or else by its being smitten down in death as the righteous punishment of rebellion. Nor is the demand unjust. Did he not make us, and does he not preserve us? Should he not receive homage from the creatures of his hand?

Next, must the sacrifice die? then *see the evil of sin.* It is not such a trifle as certain men imagine. It is a deadly evil, a killing poison. God himself in human form took human guilt upon him: the sin was none of his, it was only imputed to him, but when he was made sin for us, and bare our iniquities, there was no help for it, he must die! Even he must die! It was not possible that the cup should pass from him. A voice was heard from the throne—"Awake, O Sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd!" So unflinching is divine justice that it will not, cannot spare sin, let it be where it may; nay, not even when that guilt is not the person's own, but is only taken up by him as a substitute. Sin wherever it is must be smitten with the sword of death: this is a law fixed and unalterable. Who, then, will take pleasure in transgression? Will not every man who loves his own life arouse himself to fight against iniquity? Sinner, shake off your sin, as Paul shook off the viper into the fire. Do not dally with it. Pray God that you may have done with it. It is a horrible and a grievous thing, and God saith to you "Oh, do not this abominable thing which I hate." God help you to flee from all iniquity.

Next *learn the love of God.* Behold how he loved you and me! He must punish sin, but he must save *us*, and so he gives his Son to die in our stead. I shall not go too far if I say that in giving his Son the Lord God gave himself, for Jesus is one with the Father. We cannot divide the Substance though we distinguish the Persons: thus God himself made atonement for sin committed against himself. The church is "the flock of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." Wonder of wonders! Truly love is strong as death as we see it in the heart of God! "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This is a heaped-up marvel. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!

Next *learn how Christ has made an end of sin.* Sin is laid on him and he dies; then sin is dead and buried; if it be sought for it cannot be found. Speak of finality, this is the truest and surest finality that ever was, or shall be. "If a man die, shall he live again?" Not as before. If Christ died, what is there after death? Nothing but the judgment, and lo, he comes to that judgment: "being raised from the dead he dieth

no more, death hath no more dominion over him." This is our joy because neither sin nor death can have dominion over us for whom Christ died, and who died in him. Christ has made an end of sin. His one offering has perfected for ever the set-apart ones.

These are but a few of the great lessons which we may learn from the necessity that the Sacrifice should be slain. I pray you learn them well. May they be engraven on your hearts by the Holy Ghost.

IV. And so I shall close by saying that this blessed subject is not only full of instruction, but it is ENERGETICALLY INSPIRING.

First, this inspires us with *the spirit of consecration.* When I think that I could not be saved except by the death of Jesus, then I feel that I am not my own, but bought with a price. I remember reading of Charles Simeon, the famous evangelical clergyman of Cambridge, that he was one day thrown from his horse, and was fearful that he had sustained serious injury. When he had recovered from the force of the fall, he stretched out his right arm, felt it, and finding that there was not a bone broken, he consecrated that arm anew to the living God, who had so graciously preserved it. Then he examined his left arm and found it all right, and so held that up, and dedicated it anew unto the divine service. He did the same with his head, his legs, and his whole body. As I was thinking over this subject I felt as if I must go over my body, soul, and spirit, and dedicate all to that dear Saviour by whose blood I am altogether redeemed from death and hell. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." As I am not cast away from God, as I am not destroyed, as I am not in torment, not in hell, I dedicate to God my blood-bought spirit, soul, and body from henceforth to be the Lord's as long as ever I live. Brothers and sisters, do you not feel the same? I pray God the Holy Spirit to make you do so in a very practical manner. This doctrine of the death of Christ ought to inspire you till you sing—

> "Jesus, spotless Lamb of God,
> Thou hast bought me with thy blood,
> I would value nought beside
> Jesus—Jesus crucified.
>
> "I am thine, and thine alone,
> This I gladly, fully own;
> And, in all my works and ways,
> Only now would seek thy praise."

Next, this truth should create in us *a longing after the greatest holiness,* for we should say, "Did sin kill my Saviour? Then I will kill sin! Could I not be saved from sin except by his precious blood? Then, O sin, I will be revenged upon thee! I will drive thee out by the help of God's Spirit. I will not endure thee, nor harbour thee. I will make no provision for the flesh. As sin was the death of Christ for me, so Christ shall be the death of sin in me."

Does not this inspire you with *great love for the Lord Jesus?* Can you look at his dear wounds, and not be wounded with love for him? Are not his wounds as mouths which plead with you to yield him all your hearts? Can you gaze upon his face bedewed with bloody sweat, and then go away and be ensnared with the world's painted beauties?

Heard you ever of a wooer dressed in such robes of love as those which Jesus wore? Did ever love use such sacred means to win the beloved heart as Christ hath done? What can any one of us do but answer him thus—

"Here, Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do"?

Do you not think that this solemn truth should inspire us with *great zeal for the salvation of others?* As Christ laid down his life for us, should we not lay ourselves out for perishing souls, and, if necessary, lay down our lives for the brethren? Should we not practise self-denial in our labours to bring men to Jesus? Should we not joyfully toil, and cheerfully bear reproach, if by any means we may save some?

Methinks if this subject should go home to our hearts it would be beneficial to us in a thousand ways, and make us better soldiers of the cross, closer followers of the Lamb. I pray that God the Holy Ghost may place it in the centre of our souls, and keep it there. It will bring with it peace and rest. Why should we be troubled, since Jesus died? It will fill our mouths with praises. Hallelujah to the Lamb that was slain, who has redeemed us by his blood! It will draw us into closer communion with him. If he loved us and died for us, we must live with him, and in him, and to him. Surely it will also make us long to behold him! Oh, for the vision of the Crucified! When shall we see the face that was so marred for us? When shall we behold the hands and feet which bear the nail-marks still, and look into the wounded side bejewelled with the spear-wound? Oh, when shall we up and away from all our sins and griefs, for ever to behold him shine and see him still before us? Oh, when shall we be—

"Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in"?

Till then our hope, our solace, our glory, our victory, are all found in the blood of the Lamb, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews ix.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—427, 291, 428.

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WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

A Sermon,

Suggested by the sudden death of H.R.H. the Duke of Albany,

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 30TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."—James iv. 14.

WHEN a prince dies they toll the great bell of the cathedral that all the city may hear it, and that for miles round the tidings may spread. Swift messengers of the press bear the news through the length and breadth of the land, and all men's ears are made to tingle. A *royal* death is a national warning. A death in any one of our families is a loud call to our own household, a call which I trust we hear; but a death in the royal family has a voice to the whole nation. It will be heard, it must be heard. In this great city the crowds who care not to come to the house of God, will nevertheless hear of this lamented death, and think of it, and speak of it each man to his fellow. Death is an orator whose solemn periods demand attention, especially when he preaches from the steps of the throne. "The Lord's voice crieth unto the city," let believers be quick to hear the call to humiliation, to awakening, and to prayer that the visitation may be overruled for great and lasting good.

A *sudden* death is a specially impressive warning. If men die of old age we regard it as coming in the common course of things; but when a young man is suddenly snatched away, then we understand that though the old must die, the young may die; and that no one among us may reckon upon any long day of life, since in a moment our sun may go down ere it is yet noon. So falls the grass beneath the mower's scythe, so fades the leaf from the tree. In a moment our strength is turned to weakness, and our comeliness into corruption. Then, in accents as plain as they are terrible, the Lord saith, "Because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!"

We have this week received fresh proof that death is impartial. As the Arab proverb hath it, the black camel stops at every man's door. Sorrow has entered in at the windows of palaces, and even in the royal chamber there lieth one dead. If, therefore, death be so impartial

that he smites down the captains, let not the rank and file hope to escape. Death, which forces entrance to a prince's bedchamber, will not respect our cottage door. To us also in due time shall be brought the message, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." My ear hears a voice crying aloud, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." Will not you hear it? Will any one of you refuse the voice which speaketh from heaven? Death evidently pays no respect to character, age, or hopefulness. A man may addict himself to the service of his country, but his patriotism will not protect him. He may be surrounded with a wall of affection, but this will not screen him. He may have at command all the comforts of life, and yet life may ooze out before the physician is aware. He may be tenderly beloved of an affectionate mother, and his name may be engraven on the heart of the fondest of wives, but death hath no regard to the love of women. "It is appointed unto men once to die." There is no discharge in this war: we shall all march into this fight, and unless the Lord himself shall speedily come and end the present dispensation, we shall each one fall upon this battle-field, for the shafts of death fly everywhere, and there is no armour for either back or breast by which his cruel darts may be turned aside. I would to God that all of us retained this truth in our memories. "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." We have a very clear conviction that others will die, but as to ourselves, we put far from us the evil day, and care not to dwell upon a subject which smells so unpleasantly of the charnel-house. Yes, we admit that we shall die, but not so soon as to make it a pressing matter; we imagine that we are not within measurable distance of the tomb. Even the oldest man gives himself a little longer lease, and when he has passed his four-score years we have seen him hugging life with as much tenacity as if he had just commenced it. Brethren, in this we are not wise; but death will not spare us because we avoid him. What is there about any one of us that we should fare better than the rest of our fellow-men? We are in the same army, marching upon the same field: how shall we escape where all others fall? Two only of our race have gone into the better land without crossing the dark river of death—Enoch and Elijah; but no one among us will make a third.

Now, upon this matter we have nothing to say but what is commonplace, for, garnish them as you may, graves are among the commonest of common things. Yet a solemn reflection upon the shortness of life, and the certainty of death, may prove to be important, and even invaluable, if it be allowed to penetrate our hearts, and influence our lives. History tells us of Peter Waldo, of Lyons, who was sitting at a banquet as thoughtless and careless as any of the revellers, when suddenly one at the table bowed his head and died. Waldo was startled into thought, and went home to seek his God; he searched the Scriptures, and, according to some, became a great helper, if not the second founder, of the Waldensian church, which in the Alpine valleys kept the lamp of the gospel burning when all around was veiled in night. A whole church of God was thus strengthened and perpetuated by the hallowed influence of death upon a single mind. I suppose it is also true that Luther in his younger days, walking with his friend

Alexis, saw him struck to the ground by a flash of lightning, and became thenceforward prepared in heart for that deep work of grace through which he learned the doctrine of justification by faith, and rose to be the liberator of Europe from Papal bondage. How much every way we owe to this weighty subject! Among the earnest, the prayerful, the holy, many must own that the vaults of death have brought them spiritual health. Men have been helped to live by remembering that they must die: yea, some men knew nothing of the highest form of life till death aroused them from their deadly slumbers. I hope that God's Spirit may this morning impress many of you with these reflections, and lead you to the cross of Christ by the way of this *memento mori*. May a prince's death awaken many of you to life. He being dead now speaks to you; from yonder sunny shores he reminds you of the valley of death-shade which you must shortly traverse.

With an intense desire for our spiritual profiting I shall speak upon our text in two ways; first, let us consider *the truth in the text*, and, secondly, *the lessons in that truth*.

I. We commence with THE TRUTH IN THE TEXT, upon which we have already touched. The text begins by reminding us that we have no foresight: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." God has given us memory that we may look backward, and it were well if we used our memories better for remembrance, reflection, and repentance, but God has given us no eyes wherewith to pry into the future. He unveils the past to our penitence; but he veils the future from our curiosity. Dark days may be near at hand for some of us, but we do not perceive them. Let us be thankful that we do not, for we might multiply our afflictions by the foresight of them, and the prospect of evil to come might cast a gloom over pleasure near at hand. As we may feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, so may we faint under a thousand lashes in dreading a single stroke. It is good also that our God conceals from us our earthly joys until the time for their arrival. Great prosperity may await you, and a considerable enlargement of your temporal comfort, but you do not know it; and it is as well that you should not, for you might be none the better for the prospect. Earth's goods are like bird-lime, and are fearfully apt to glue us down to things below, and prevent our soaring towards heaven. If then we could know all the pleasurable events that may happen to us we might become more worldly and more earthbound than we are. None of us could desire that this present evil world should have an increased influence over us: we are glad that it should have less, and therefore we rejoice that its future has such slight power over us because of its being unknown.

No, we cannot see far, and those who act as if they could see into coming days behave most foolishly. Hear these people whom James describes; they boast most wretchedly: they will go into the city, they are sure they will, what is to hinder them? "To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city,"—they have plenty of time, and can make a selection according to their pleasure: they can go where they like, and when they like. They see themselves with prophetic glance entering in at the city gate, and they are fully assured that they shall "continue there a year." Of course, a year that is a small matter: if they please they will stay longer. They allot themselves a lease for three, seven.

fourteen, or twenty-one years, at discretion; at least they talk as if they could do so. They are going into the city to "buy and sell:" they are sure of that too. Of course they will not be laid up with sickness; they do not fear that accident or disease will keep them away from market, or hinder the active transacting of their business. No, they are going to buy and sell, and such is their confidence in their own superior abilities that they are sure to make a profit of it: the markets cannot fall below the price which they have fixed in their own minds, neither will they make bad debts, nor incur other losses, for they have decided that they will "get gain." Hitherto they have been self-made men, and they mean to go on making themselves, until they put the finishing stroke by adding a few more thousands. They have visions of going on to fortune. Ah, ye prophets, ye are going to your graves! This is a sure oracle. The tomb will be your only patrimony, and the shroud your sole possession. Let none of us talk of what we resolve to do at some future date. Look well to the present, for that is all the time we can be sure of, and there may be little enough of that. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Thus said the wise man; let wise men take heed to his counsel.

The apostle emphasizes the folly of this supposed foresight by telling us that we cannot even reckon upon another day. You have come close up to the end of March, but if you reckon upon what you will do upon the first of April, you may find by the event that you are a fool. You may get to the last day of the year; but if you reckon on a new year, you may be giving new proof of your unwisdom. Even in the morning we cannot make sure of the eventide, nor in the evening can we reckon upon the morning. James puts the matter strongly when he asks: "What is your life?" You do not know what is going to happen on the morrow, for you do not know your own life. What is it?

The text divides itself into an emphatic question, "What is your life?" and an instructive answer: "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

First, I say, we have here *an emphatic question:* he asks, "What is your life?" For solidity, for stability; what is it? What is there in it? Is it not composed of such stuff as dreams are made of? The breath in your nostrils is not more unsubstantial than is your life. There, breathe it out! On such a morning as this you see your breath; but it is only in your sight for a moment, and then it vanishes away. Your own breath is a fair picture of the flimsy, airy thing which men call life. What is your life? What is it for continuance? Some things last awhile, and run adown the centuries; but what is your life? Even garments bear some little wear and tear; but what is your life? A delicate texture; no cobweb is a tithe as frail. It will fail before a touch, a breath. Justinian, an emperor of Rome, died by going into a room which had been newly painted; Adrian, a pope, was strangled by a fly; a consul struck his foot against his own threshold, and his foot mortified, so that he died thereby. There are a thousand gates to death; and, though some seem to be narrow wickets, many souls have passed through them. Men have been choked by a grape stone, killed by a tile falling from the

roof of a house, poisoned by a drop, carried off by a whiff of foul air. I know not what there is that is too little to slay the greatest king. It is a marvel that man lives at all. So unstable is our life that the apostle says, What is it? So frail, so fragile is it, that he does not call it a flower of the field, or the snuff of a candle, but asks, What is our life? It is as if he had said—Is it anything? Is it not a near approach to nothing?

Have you ever noticed how David answers this question in the thirty-ninth Psalm? He says in the fifth verse of that psalm that *man is vanity.* What is vanity? It is nothing in reality, it is merely the pretence of something; it is an idle dream, an empty conceit, a delusion, a make-believe. Such is man. But he says more than that: he declares that *every man* is vanity. Princes, kings, philosophers, the strongest, the healthiest, the ablest, the most virtuous—every man is vanity: among the millions of mankind none rises above this dreary state of nothingness. He says more than that: he writes—*every man at his best state is vanity:* when he is in the prime and glory of his life, when he is most healthy and vigorous, when his eye is clearest, and his muscles are firmest, he is still no better than sheer vanity. David goes even further, for thus he speaks—"*Every man at his best state is altogether vanity;*" that is, he is nothing but vanity, there is nothing more enduring about him. He is gone with a puff; he spends his years as a tale that is told. Do not overlook one more emphatic word which David sets in the forefront of the sentence, "*Verily,*" as if he was quite sure of it, and could not tolerate a question upon the subject—"*Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.*"

Have you ever observed how Job, when he speaks of our life, sets us a sign in each of the three elements whereon and wherein we dwell? See his ninth chapter, at the twenty-fifth verse. He says, "My days are swifter than a post:" here is an emblem upon the land. Oriental kings employed swift-footed runners and horses and dromedaries, and these to the Oriental imagination were the very *beau idéal* of speed: even we, before the days of electricity, knew of nothing faster than the royal mail. Job therefore well says, "My days are swifter than a post." Then he bids us look to sea, for he says, "They are passed away as the swift ships;" ships which are built for speed seem to fly as on wings when they spread their sails to a favouring wind. We ought not to view ships at sea without remembering the brevity of our days. But lest we should still forget, the patriarch further likens his days to "the eagle that hasteth to the prey." As the vulture spies from a distance the carcase of a camel, and descends upon it with hasty swoop, so our life hastes to descend. Thus earth, sea, and air all remind us of the speed at which life flies towards its end.

St. Augustine used to say he did not know whether to call it a dying life or a living death, and I leave you the choice between those two expressions. This is certainly a dying life; its march is marked by graves. Nothing but a continuous miracle keeps any one of us from the sepulchre. Were omnipotence to stay its power but for a moment, earth would return to earth, and ashes to ashes. It is a dying life: and equally true is it that it is a living death. We are always dying. Every beating pulse we tell leaves but the number less: the more years we count

in our life, the fewer remain in which we shall behold the light of day. While we are sitting still in this house, the earth is revolving round the sun, and bearing us all through space at an amazing rate. We are all moving, and yet we do not perceive it; even so while you are listening to this sermon you are all being borne onward towards eternity at lightning speed. As though we were laid in the bosom of some mighty angel, and he with outstretched wings darted along like a flame of fire. we are ever urging our onward way. Though we dream that we are at a stay, yet we never rest for an instant. The stream is bearing us onward: we are nearing the cataract. Ever must we obey the mandate—"Onward, onward, onward." From childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to grey old age we march onward in serried ranks from which no man can retire. We tarry not even when we sleep: we are continually moving forward like the waters of yonder river, on whose banks we find a habitation. What, then, is our life? That is a question which remains to a large degree unanswered and unanswerable.

Yet our text affords us what is in some aspects *an instructive answer*. It does not so much tell us what life actually is as what it is like. "*It is even a vapour.*" James compares our life, you see, to a very subtle, unsubstantial, flimsy thing—a vapour. If you live upon an eminence, from which you can look down upon a stretch of country, you see in the early morning a mist covering all the valleys. It is singular to mark the tops of the great elms appearing above it, like islands in a sea of cloud, with perhaps here and there a church spire rising like a sharp pyramid from the waste of mist. In a little time you look from the same window, and the vapour has all vanished. It was so thin, so fine, so much like gossamer, that a breath of wind has scattered it, or peradventure the sun has drawn it aloft; at any rate, not a trace of that all-encompassing vapour remains. Such is your life. Or you have marked a cloud in the western sky, illuminated with those marvellous lights which glowed during those extraordinary sunsets, the like of which none of our fathers had seen. You looked at the jewelled mass; it shone in the perfection of beauty, and all the colours of the rainbow were blended in its hues: in another instant, lo, it was not; it was gone past all recall. Such is your life. This morning, as we came hither, we saw our breath: it was before our eye for an instant, and anon it had gone. Such is the picture which James presents to us. "What is your life? It is even a vapour."

He proceeds to explain his own symbol in a sentence which is full of meaning. "It is even a vapour, *that appeareth.*" Notice that. He does not speak of it as a substance, having a true existence, but says that it "*appeareth.*" Vapour is so ethereal, phantom-like, and unreal, that it may rather be said to appear than to exist. If you could reach yon fleecy cloud, you would scarcely know that you had entered it, for it would possibly appear to be the thinnest of mist. The vapour which steams from your mouth, how light, how airy, it is next door to nothing; it only "appeareth." And such is this life—a dream, a vain show, an apparition of the night. Half our joys and sorrows are but the pretence of joy and the shadow of sorrow; and the most of things through which we travel are not what they seem. We ought to know this in a practical way, and set less store by the things

which are seen, which are temporal. This life "appeareth"—that is all.

Further the apostle says, It "appeareth *for a little time*." It is only a very little while that a man lives at the longest. Compare a man's life with that of a tree. There is so striking a contrast between our present short life and that of a cedar, or an oak, that to set forth the longer life of saints in the millennial age the Lord says, "As the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands." In that happy age men shall flourish long as the trees of the forest; but now a man standing beneath an oak is a mere infant compared with the boughs which overshadow him. A hundred years ago that oak seemed every way as venerable as it does to-day, whereas the man was then unthought of by his grandsire. Compare our life with the existence of this world; I mean not the present state of the earth as fitted up for man, but I allude to those unknown ages which intervened between the present arrangement and that beginning wherein God created the heavens and the earth. The long eras of fire and water, the reigns of fishes and reptiles, the periods of tropical heat and polar ice, make one think of man as a thing of yesterday. Then contrast our life with the being of the eternal Lord: and what is man—man when most venerable with years? A Methuselah, what is he? He is but an insect born in the morning's sunbeam, sporting in the noontide ray, and dead when the dews begin to fall. He appeareth for a little while.

The parallel is further consummated by the apostle's adding, "*And then vanisheth away.*" The cloud is gone from the mountain. Where is it? It has vanished away. No trace of it is left: neither can you recall it. We too shall soon be gone; gone as a dream when one awaketh. With the most of us our remembrance will be short. Many leave us concerning whom it would be a pity that they should be remembered; while many fail to live for others, and therefore their fellows speedily forget them. Amid the crowded cemetery a single grave is lost; amid ten thousand deaths no one departure can long abide in human memory. As far as this world is concerned we all shall by-and-by vanish away. Then shall our near companion say of us,

> "One morn I missed him on the accustomed hill,
> Along the heath, and near his favourite tree;
> Another came, nor yet beside the rill,
> Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he."

The air has felt the passing-bell, and now the stars look down upon a stone writ large with "HERE HE LIES!" Or the dews shall wet a grass-grown mound, girt about with brambles, on which a few wild flowers have sprung up spontaneously to show how life shall yet triumph over death. Children may bear our name, and yet a fourth generation shall quite forget that we ever sojourned in this region. Such is our life—"a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." This is the truth; you know it, but I cannot impress it upon your hearts as it ought to be impressed; hence I invite you to join me in the prayer, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

II. Secondly, let us now learn THE LESSONS WHICH LIE WITHIN THIS TRUTH. May we read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the same.

First, If this life be unsubstantial as a vapour,—and nobody can deny the fact,—let us regard it as such, and let us seek for something substantial elsewhere.

> "This world's a dream, an empty show;
> But the great world to which I go
> Hath joys substantial and sincere:
> When shall I wake and find me there?"

It may be well to make the best of both worlds; but of this poor world nothing can be made unless it be viewed in the light of another. This is a poor withering life at the best, for we all do fade as a leaf. Unless we purposely live with a view to the next world, we cannot make much out of our present existence. Such cast clouts and rotten rags as this poor present world of time and sense, can never be made up into an array in which a man would care to robe himself. At the same time, do not be frightened at the unhandsome form in which this life at times appears: it is after all but a vapour; and who will be alarmed at it? Do not be overjoyed as he was who hoped to embrace a goddess, and was deceived by a cloud: it is after all but a semblance; its sorrows are scarcely worth a tear, nor do its joys deserve a smile; vanity and vapour are things which wise men set small store by. Children may be pleased with the bubbles which they blow by the aid of an old pipe and a piece of soap; but as for men who have put away childish things, they ought not to be greatly moved by the things of this life, for they are but bubbles of less brilliance and less substance than those which delight the boy. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity." Let the lower lights burn dimly before your eye; they are mere sparks, they are quenched full soon. Let us grip the eternal, and sit loose by the temporal. The jewels of eternity will glitter in our crowns when all things pass away; but the trifles of this life are as the flowers which children pluck in the meadows, which wither in their hands before they can carry them home.

In this place I suggest as your prayer that stanza of the poet, in which he addresses the Well-beloved thus—

> "Show me thy face—
> My faith and love
> Shall henceforth fixed be,
> And nothing here have power to move
> My soul's serenity.
> My life shall seem a trance, a dream,
> And all I feel and see
> Illusive, visionary,—Thou
> The one reality."

Next, Is life most uncertain? We know it is: no one attempts to deny it. It is certain that life will come to an end; but it is most uncertain when it will come to that end. Is it so uncertain? Then let us not delay. I would to God I could whisper this wisdom into every procrastinator's ear. Why dost thou halt and hesitate? If thou art desirous to be saved from the wrath to come, why dost thou put it off

till a to-morrow which may never come? Wilt thou delay repenting, and die impenitent? Wilt thou delay faith, and perish as an unbeliever? Wilt thou keep back from mercy and pardon, and refuse the free grace of God? I pray thee do not so; for if thou delay another day, it may be thou wilt be in the land where hope can never come to thee. Think of your peril, O ye ungodly men! Within an hour you may be at the judgment-seat of God, or in the pit of hell. Nothing keeps you where there is hope except a thread so fine as to be invisible, and so easily broken that none but a madman would trust his soul's destiny upon it. Awake, I pray thee! Since death is hastening, haste thou thyself until thou hast found a refuge in the cleft of the Rock of Ages, and art safe in the arms of Jesus. Since life is so uncertain, oh, haste thee, Christian, to serve thy God while the opportunity is given thee: be diligent to-day to do those works which perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do. Thou wilt soon be where thou canst no more give alms to the poor, nor instruct the ignorant, nor visit the fatherless and the widow. Thou shalt have no opportunities for speaking to men about their souls, or winning them for Christ, when once this shadowy life has vanished away. How earnest every worker ought to be to do his work well while he has the opportunity! I have charged myself again and again—I would to God the charge had been more effectual—to preach

> "As though I ne'er might preach again,
> A dying man to dying men."

I am persuaded that if we were in possession of all the wisdom that grace will give us, we should do everything for the good of men most speedily, with deep prayerfulness, with true spiritual life, and with an entire dependence upon the Spirit of God for the blessing of it. Come, my brother, what thou doest do quickly. If thou wishest to honour thy Lord whilst thou art here, and win jewels for his crown, up and at it, for the day is far spent. Thou canst not afford to waste a moment, for thou hast much to do, and very little time to do it in. Help us, O Spirit of the Lord!

Is life so short? Does it only appear for a little time, and then vanish away? Then let us put all we can into it. If life be short, it is wisdom to have no fallows, but to sow every foot of ground while we can. It will be prudent to pack our little space as full as possible. Somebody said the other day of our dear friend Mr. Moody, that he was the only man who could pronounce "Jerusalem" in two syllables. It shows the activity of the man that he can speak as much in two syllables as other people can say in four: he is always at it, working for his Master double tides, rowing with both hands. Some speakers are long in delivering short sense; instead of saying much in little, they say little in much. Oh, for some one to teach them to say "Jerusalem" in two syllables!

Let us put plenty of life into our existence, plenty of work into our life, plenty of heart into our work, and plenty of warmth into our heart. Oh, may God give us to live while we live! May we not only live but be all alive.

Is life so short? Then do not let us make any very great provision for it. I have heard of certain people who are so imprudent that they

never lay by anything for a rainy day, to whom I would say, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." It would be a poverty-stricken world if all followed the example of improvidence which is set by certain spiritual blunderers. There is a thriftiness which we all ought to exercise; but there is no justification for laying up treasure which will never be used. Ants do not store up grain for storing's sake: they do but divide over the whole year the harvest of a month. To hoard up endless gold is a species of insanity. If I were going a day's voyage, I should not wish to take with me enough biscuit and salt beef to last for three years; it would only cumber the boat. One walking-stick is an admirable help, as I often find; but to carry a bundle of them when going on a journey would be a superfluity of absurdity. Alas, how many load themselves as if life's journey would last a thousand years, at the least! Some men have amassed hundreds of thousands of pounds: when are they going to enjoy their wealth? They are getting more and more, and this occupies all their time: they are so busy cooking that they never have time to dine; they are so taken up with filling the wardrobe that they are all in rags. We do not want a ton weight of candles if we are only going to sit up for a few minutes. Let us be wise enough to suit the supply to the need.

Is time so short? Then do not let us fret about its troubles and discomforts. A man is on a journey, and puts up at an inn, and when he is fairly in the hostelry, he perceives that it is a poor place, with scant food, and a hard bed. "Well, well," says he, "I am off the first thing to-morrow morning, and so it does not matter." This world is an inn, and if there are certain discomforts in it, let us remember that we are not tenants for years, but only guests for a day. Let us make the best we can of the temporary accommodation which this poor shanty of a world affords. Our life is removed as a shepherd's tent, which was a hovel in which the shepherds watched their sheep. A shepherd who has to watch the sheep for a short time does not set to work to build a granite palace, or a brick house: he is satisfied with a reed hut, and does not complain of its scant space and slender strength. So let it be with us. Let us sing together—

> "The way may be rough, but it cannot be long;
> So let's smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

Must life vanish away? We know it must. What then? That vanishing is the end of one life and the beginning of another. Dear friends, may I recommend you to remember that death is the end of this life? Do not leave this life to be ravelled out at the end. I would like to have a well-hemmed life, with a finish about it. I would like to have my life enclosed with a ring-fence of completeness. Too many leave life's business in such a way that they leave endless trouble for their families: lawyers devour their substance, and their children are impoverished. See that your will is made, your debts paid, your charities distributed, and all your affairs are arranged. Set your house in order: it is your duty as a citizen; it is your higher duty as a Christian. Do all that you would like to have done if you knew you would die

to-morrow. I like Mr. Whitefield's order; for he could not go to bed comfortably if his gloves were not in his hat ready for the morning. He felt that he could not tell when he would be called away; but he wished to have everything in its place whenever the summons should come.

Must this life vanish away? Then recollect it is the beginning of another. The life present melts into the life to come. What kind of life will that other be? Do you not think that if it is to be a glorious life it ought to commence here? Who would like to enter heaven, could it be possible, and feel compelled to say, "I cannot join in the music, for I do not know the tune; I cannot take up the hymn, for I know nothing of the song. I cannot glorify God, for I never did so while below. I cannot adore the Lamb, for I never trusted in him while I was on earth." You must learn the music here, or you will never sing in the choirs of heaven. Oh, that this might arouse some of you! By the memory that this life must vanish away may you be led to seek that eternal life which will abide in its excellency world without end.

And is death quite sure to come to me? Then, as I cannot avoid it, let me face it. If there were a way of avoiding it, I might postpone all consideration of it; but since I must meet it, let me know what I am at; let me get ready for the inevitable, may be it will become desirable. The thought of death will be one of two things to us: it will be a ghost to haunt us if we remain out of Christ, unreconciled to God, and unrenewed in heart. To Godless and Christless persons death will be the king of terrors in prospect and in reality. Ungodly men cannot bear to think of being called away. This morning they feel very uncomfortable while I am treating upon this troublesome subject. I hope they will not soon recover their composure, but will remain uncomfortable till they yield to divine love, and trust in the living Saviour. Death is an awful thing to those who have their all in this world. If they could but live here for ever, they would be at peace; but it cannot be so. God will not give men an immortality in this life to spend in disregarding him. They must die. They may put Christ far from them, but they cannot put death far from them; they may avoid the Cross, but they cannot avoid the grave. The ungodly man frowns upon death because death frowns upon him. Death is the skeleton in his closet; it is the spectre at the foot of his bed; it is the canker of his fairest joy. I would not like to be in such a position. Count me down all the red gold that could buy this round world, yet would I not accept it if I must live in fear of death.

But death will become another thing to you if you are renewed in heart. To the Christian it is an angel beckoning him onward and upward. It were not worth while to live on earth if this life were not to be crowned by death: I mean by leaving this world to go unto the Father. It is the supreme delight of the man who runs the race that is set before him that that course concludes with the winning-post, and so comes to an end. We are not of those who voyage the sea of this life for the sake of it: we ask not for ever to sail over this rough ocean, we long for land. It is our delight to think of the port ahead, our joy to see the snow-white cliffs of our heavenly Albion. We do not desire to live here always. Why should we? Banished from our God, liable

to sin, subject to temptation, vexed with infirmities, struggling with corruptions, O Lord, what wait we for?

> "Welcome, sweet hour of full discharge
> That sets my longing soul at large,
> Takes off my chains, breaks up my cell,
> And gives me with my God to dwell!"

Believers have everything to gain by dying. "To die is gain." We shall lose nothing which will be a loss to us. If one should take from us a jewel, but should give us another a thousand times its value, we should not regret the exchange. We lose this life, let it be such a jewel as you like, but we win the life to come, which is infinitely more precious. Beloved, instead of fearing death, we would be willing rather to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Why should we be unwilling to be glorified? Our departing day is our marriage-day. Oh, that the bells would ring it in! It is our home-coming from the school where we have been in training here below. Why are the minutes so slow, the years so long? Let the holidays, the holy days, come soon, when we shall be at home in the Father's house! "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," but it very soon will appear, and it will be no mere appearing—it will be real joy and lasting pleasure, solid, substantial, eternal, like the God who has prepared it for us from of old. It is a blessed thing to be able to go through the world thanking God for this life, but blessing him yet more that it will land us at his right hand. Death is thus stripped of all dread; the curse is turned into a blessing. At the thought of it I feel ready to join in that rough but sweet verse—

> "Since Jesus is mine, I'll not fear undressing,
> But gladly put off these garments of clay;
> To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,
> Since Jesus to glory through death led the way."

God grant us so to live and die that we may live to die no more, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxxix. James iv. 11—17.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—90, 823, 39.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

GOD'S WORK UPON MINISTER AND CONVERT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 6TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."—Acts xxvi. 16—20.

BEHOLD an amazing sight! Saul of Tarsus at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth! Listen! The persecutor's voice is changed into that of an enquiring disciple. He asks, "What wilt thou have me to do?" If angels sang with delight over a new-made world, their song must have been seven times as joyous over a new-made apostle. The change was miraculous. At this distance of time we can hardly appreciate it; but if we had been living in daily fear of our lives, if we had seen our father or our brother dragged off to death by this ferocious enemy of the cross, and then had suddenly heard that he was converted to the faith which he opposed, we should have cried, "Incredible!" For the Ethiopian to change his skin, or for the leopard to lose his spots, would be little compared with this cruel Pharisee bowing himself in lowly penitence before the Lord Jesus whom he had persecuted. Do you wonder that when Saul was come to Jerusalem, and assayed to join himself to the disciples, they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple? My brethren, as in history, so in the grace of God, it is the unexpected which frequently occurs. The men and women whom I expected to confess Christ long ago have not yet come. I have seen Felix tremble, but I have not seen him converted; I have seen Agrippa almost persuaded, but he is not yet a Christian. Meanwhile, I have beheld a Saul of Tarsus, who aforetime raged against the cross, bowing himself submissively before the Lord Jesus.

Let us never be discouraged; but let us expect to see signs and wonders in the world of grace. Though priestcraft is far too dominant

in our land, we yet may hear that "a great company of the priests" have believed in Christ. Though freethought rides roughshod over everything, we may yet hear that the boldest freethinkers have been made truly free, and have felt the power of his thoughts, which are as high above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth. Who knows, good brother, but that son who has caused you the greatest grief may yet give you the greatest pleasure? That one among your relatives who seems most decidedly to take the wrong side may yet become a leader in the armies of Christ. Hope on! hope ever!

Note with care how men are converted; I shall show you God's preparation for it, in *a work wrought upon the minister*, making him a fit witness for the truth; then I shall speak upon *God's work wrought in the convert* in opening his eyes, and turning him from darkness to light; and, lastly, I shall call your attention to *a work which must be wrought by the convert himself;* for Paul preached that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

I. First, let us notice A WORK WROUGHT BY GOD UPON THE MINISTER. "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." "Faith cometh by hearing." "How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?" In order to the conversion of the hearer many processes must be experienced by the preacher: he must be made, called, sent, and afterwards delivered. All the work of the Lord upon him is a work of grace on behalf of those who shall be converted by his means.

The minister whom God sends is first of all *himself subdued*, and made to be obedient to the will of his Lord. While a man is a rebel the Lord does not appoint him to act as an ambassador; while he is dead in sin he does not commission him to preach the way of life. Paul was struck down to the earth: if he had not himself fallen, he would not have known how to lift up others whom the Lord has laid low. There flashed into his face a light above the brightness of the sun; he declares, "I could not see for the glory of that light." He remained blind for three days; and this, also, was necessary; for if he had not been shut up in that darkness, he would not have been qualified to deal with others on whom the darkness of conviction had settled. An experience of breaking down and of soul-horror is necessary to prepare a man for after-usefulness among the convicted, the desponding, and the despairing. It may be that some young man present this morning is undergoing a singularly severe discipline at the hands of the Holy Spirit. His sins are exceedingly heavy upon him, and relief does not come. A companion of his who was aroused at the same time has found rest, and is already rejoicing in the light; but this young brother finds the darkness thicken about him. Dear friend, it may be that your deeper conviction and more oppressive sense of sin are needful because in your future life you are to be made largely helpful to troubled hearts. Do not think that everybody is blind for three days, as Paul was when he did neither eat nor drink during all that time; but conclude that some peculiar end is to be served by this remarkable experience. Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened to receive the truth, was not thus blinded and troubled; but then she was not called to be an apostle to preach the gospel from Jerusalem to Spain. The weapon which is to be most used

in battle must be more completely hardened than that which is for peaceful service. Discipline in our own spiritual life is a part of ministerial education which the chosen of the Lord shall not miss. See then, how God may be working for the conversion of generations yet unborn in the deep and painful experience of individuals who are now being turned from darkness to light. See, my dear hearer, what God may have done already in the hearts of his chosen ministers to fit them to become the means of your conversion. In order to slay your sins the shaft has been polished. Another has groaned and wept, and cried out in bitter agony, in order that he may know how to speak a word in season to you. Each of the best locks made by our eminent locksmiths is unique and by itself; and when this is the case, each lock needs its own special key: so is it with human minds, there is a peculiarity about each one. Certain minds will never be reached until they come in contact with other minds constituted on purpose to touch them. I know that there is a suitability in my experience to affect many of my fellow-men, and they open to me when the Lord takes me in his hand, and uses me as his key; but I also feel that in all probability I shall never move certain other individuals, because my mental conformation excites prejudice in them; I do not fit them, and they will not permit me to be of use to them. Thank God, he has other servants, and by these I trust he will accomplish good for those to whom I am an unsuitable instrument. Assuredly I know that much of the experience through which I have passed has not been with a view to myself, but with a view to those persons to whom the Lord will make me his channel of blessing. Consider, then, how gracious is the Lord thus to be working upon his own servants, with the design of saving some of you who are far from him.

The next preparation for the Lord's minister was that *he should be encouraged.* The Lord Jesus said to him, "Rise, and stand upon thy feet." As much as to say—"Thou art forgiven, thou art chosen, thou art beloved: therefore lie no longer prostrate, overwhelmed with fear. Give not way to despondency. Resign thyself into my hands, and be prepared with activity and diligence to spend all the rest of thy life in doing good. Arise, stand on thy feet, for work is to be done at once which will need all thy courage and might!" Men can hardly be very useful till they cease to be despondent, diffident, and depressed, and become energetic and hopeful. Even good men need to be braced up that they may rise to bold attempts and believing labours for their Lord. Many are slow to take the encouragement which is offered them, and need to hear a voice, saying, "Shake thyself from the dust, O captive! Rise, and serve thy God." I wish that I could speak to any brother here whose heart is true and right, and who has the power to be exceedingly useful, but who has not yet the courage to proceed to his proper work. O my brother, rise and stand upon thy feet. "Alas," you say, "I have tried to do good, but I have seen no effects following my endeavours. I have spoken to one or two about their souls, but I have not yet won a heart for Christ." Did you really expect to do so? I have noticed that those who do not believe that they will be successful seldom are so; but those who rise and stand upon their feet, and manfully expect that God will bless them are not disappointed. We are not to hope for success

because there is anything in us, but because God has promised that his word shall not return unto him void; and if we therefore sow in faith, a harvest will assuredly follow. Faith receives promises; unbelief goes empty-handed. Arise, then, and stand upon your feet.

Who knows but somebody who shall receive encouragement this morning will from this day become the messenger of God to open the blind eyes of others? The strengthening of the worker is as needful a part of God's work as the immediate operation of the Spirit with the message. The vessel must be prepared for the Master's use, and grace is to be clearly seen in the making and fitting of that vessel for so divine a purpose.

The uplifting work being done, it remained that Paul should now be *made, constituted, and ordained a minister*, and to this end he must see the Lord for himself. The Lord said, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness." It is plain from these words that the right way to make ministers is for the Lord Jesus Christ to appear to them. We have heard of making men into ministers, but we have no belief in the result of such a manufacture. If one man makes another man a minister, he will be very badly made, and the sooner he is broken up again the better. The fabrication of man is not fit to be an instrument for the Lord. All the laying on of hands, and all the fitness that can be given in College or University cannot possibly make a minister apart from the revelation of the Son of God to the heart. If God intends to use any man, he must be as much the creation of God as are the heavens and the earth.

The means which the Lord uses for the true preacher's education and ordination are here displayed before us. It is by Christ's appearing to the man that he is prepared to preach the Lord Christ among men.

Our Lord's appearing to a man operates two ways: first, it makes him willing to be a servant, for that is the meaning of the word "minister." When the renewed mind beholds the Lord, it adores him, and cries out, "What wilt thou have me to do?" A sight of the glory of Christ, of the love of Christ, of the sufferings of Christ, constrains a believer to render unto the Lord all that lies in his power of cheerful service. Who that has beheld the unrivalled beauties of Jesus can refuse him honour? Having seen thee, O my Lord, I become henceforth thy servant, and feel it a privilege to minister to the very least of thy redeemed according as thou mayest appoint.

The same heavenly vision qualifies the believer to act as a witness for Jesus. We cannot bear witness to that which we have never seen. Hearsay is of small value, we must see for ourselves. Christ must appear to his elect servant or he will not be able to go forth and tell what he has seen. The true prophet is a seer: he sees, and therefore speaks. "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." If thou hast had no vision, hold thy tongue, for thou hast no message; but if thou hast seen, then tell thou carefully only what thou hast seen, adding nothing thereto and taking nothing therefrom. Thy message is that which God hath revealed to thee by his Holy Spirit in his Word, and in thine own spiritual experience.

See you, then, dear friends, that in order to the conversion of those who are not yet saved, the Lord Jesus has been at work upon others,

making them fit to be servants and witnesses, and he has used as his chief means of instruction the revealing of himself. This is instructive, for it gives us a clear indication as to the best method of accomplishing the salvation of those around us. Beloved, if you want to win souls follow up this line of things. Soul-winning is generally accomplished not by argument, but by testimony. The best minister is a witness-bearer. "Butler's Analogy" is one of the most notable works in defence of revelation, and it is eminently calculated to impress the student with the truthfulness of our holy religion; but I should like to know whether there ever was a man, woman, or child truly converted to the Lord Jesus by "Butler's Analogy." I do not think it. Nor do I depreciate the work on that account, for it has other uses which it admirably serves. This, however, I am certain of, that a little book like the "Dairyman's Daughter," by Leigh Richmond, which is not worthy for a moment to be compared with "Butler's Analogy" as a display of intellectual power, has led thousands to saving faith in the Lord Jesus. That little biography of a peasant girl, a mere nothing as to thought compared with the wonderful "Analogy," has brought tens of thousands to the Saviour's feet, where the other has brought few, if any. What is the reason? The "Analogy" is a very clear and admirable argument, but the "Dairyman's Daughter" is a witness of what has been seen, and tasted, and handled by one like ourselves. Heads are won by reasoning, but hearts are won by witness-bearing. Our lines of things should be that of David—"I will declare what the Lord hath done for my soul." Paul frequently repeated the story of his own conversion, for he knew of nothing more likely to convince and convert. I do not believe that people will ever be converted by gaudy rhetoric. Poetical expressions are too fine to draw men away from sin to holiness: men do not come to Christ on the back of Pegasus. Argument which appeals only to the intellect is poor fuel with which to kindle the fire of love to Christ; and even sound instruction will not suffice without personal witness to vivify and support it. To convince men of the truth of a statement is one thing, to convict them of personal sin is another thing, and to convert them is a step higher still. Bear witness to what you know, to what you feel, to the power of Christ to pacify the conscience and to change the life; bear, I say, your witness to Jesus, and you will have done that which God will bless to the opening of the eyes of the spiritually blind.

Further, dear friends, the man who is to win a soul for Christ *must be continuously instructed of God.* He is to be a witness not only of those things which he has seen, but also of those things in the which the Lord will yet appear unto him. The discipline and tuition which our Lord vouchsafes to his servant when he begins his witness, will not suffice him for the whole of his life: he must continue to be taught that he may continue to teach. You who wish to win souls for Jesus—and I know many of you do—must always sit at his feet yourselves. Your eyes must evermore be fixed upon your Master, so that his dear image may photograph itself perpetually upon your heart. Our message, if it is to daily win souls for Jesus, must come to us daily. The manna of last year, where is it if we have hoarded it? In a day it bred worms—where is it after many days? As the manna fell fresh and fresh each morning,

so must we each day learn more and more of him. We should strive each day to obtain a more close, a more tender, more experimental view of him. We must feel our sinnership more deeply, and therefore recognize more fully the power of his precious blood; we must grieve over our corruption more bitterly, and therefore understand better the power of the renewing Spirit who cleanses the heart. We want to live upon Jesus hourly that so we may talk of the tree of life with the flavour of its fruit upon our palates. It is poor work to talk of a Saviour whom we have not communed with for months, but it is blessed to come forth from his presence to describe his beauties. Oh to live in Christ, and on Christ, and then to preach live sermons from live texts. Even the dead in sin will feel the force of so vital a ministry. God the Holy Ghost must work all this in those whom he prepares to be the implements of his gracious work. Herein he shows much love to sinners who as yet care nothing for his operations.

Where all this is done, there yet remains somewhat more, namely, *that God should constantly preserve his messenger;* as he said to Paul; "Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." Paul's life was always in danger, and yet never in real peril, for the Lord was his keeper. He was daily delivered unto death, and yet he was immortal till his life-work was complete. They stoned him and supposed that he was dead; but he rose up and began to cheer the brethren. Till his time came and his work was finished, the stormy sea could not drown him, the beasts of Ephesus could not devour him, the mob could not kill him, even sworn conspirators could not slay him. When he had finished his course, he submitted his neck to the headsman's sword; but till that moment he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion, and guarded from perils of robbers, perils of rivers, and perils by false brethren. So shall every true servant of Christ be kept as with a garrison from all evil. We do not nowadays run risks of the kind which beset the apostle, but ours are more subtle and insinuating: yet the true servant of God shall be preserved from all evil. He shall be kept from the pride which cometh of visible success, and from the despondency which cometh of apparent failure; he shall be delivered from the temptations common to man, and from the peculiar temptations which compass him as a minister of Christ. He shall be delivered from the strife of tongues, and from the tumult of the people. If God has sent him, the devil cannot withstand him: he shall perform his mission in the conversion of those whom the Lord intends to save.

I earnestly invite you to look at this portion of the machinery of grace, for some entirely overlook it. Conversion is a very simple business, and yet if I were to say that the heavens, and the earth, and all things that are, and are to be, are made subservient to its accomplishment, I should not go too far. Everything is laid under commission to save the chosen. Each elect soul might say, "Thou hast given commandment to save me." I have known the Lord bring men to himself not only by his ministers, but by the simplest things and most common events. A young woman utterly careless and godless returned to her room one night where she had left her lamp burning, but, lo, it had gone out, and she was in darkness. As she sought for the lamp she

remembered the parable of our Lord, and the cry of the foolish virgins "Our lamps have gone out." She reflected that her lamp had gone out because she had forgotten to put oil to it that morning; and there and then, under the power of the word of God, she knelt down and gave her heart to Christ. A funeral knell, a tempest, a faded flower, a picture, have all been God's means of bringing his banished home to himself. I am constantly meeting with instances of individuals who for years were careless, irreligious, dissipated, and vicious, and rose one Sabbath morning to waste the day as usual; but by some circumstance or other they were induced to hear Mr. Moody, or to turn in here, or to attend a theatre service; and there and then the Lord met with them. That God who could control the crowing of a cock to work conversion in his servant Peter, has servants everywhere, from the highest angel to the tiniest insect. It is delightful to think that God can put any man or any creature into commission to carry out his purposes of love. Is it not a wonderful proof of his great love, that he thus makes all things subservient to the salvation of men, and specially that he creates ministers, and leads, and trains, and fits them to become the spiritual parents of others? Oh, sinners, how glad I should be if you would think of yourselves, for you see how practically God thinks of you!

II. And now, secondly, we come to describe THE WORK WHICH IS WROUGHT IN THE HEARER when God is saving him.

It usually begins *by illumination:* the Lord sends his servant "to open their eyes." Men are born blind; and continue blind till by the power of Jesus sight is given to them. Opening the eye of the mind is not an operation which usually demands much time. In Paul's case we read, "Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." The mind sees truth on a sudden, the aspect of everything is altered; and the man has obtained a new faculty. What a blessing it will be if the Lord has sent me to any of you this day that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost! A film shuts out the light from your souls, so that you grope as blind men; but the Lord can at once remove it. Perhaps you are ignorant. If you did but know the truth, you would see by its light. Oh, that the Holy Spirit may teach you! Or your education and your surroundings have placed a film of prejudice over your eyes: if a candid, childlike spirit were given you, you would speedily see. Or possibly some favourite sin is like a cataract upon the eye of your conscience, and you cannot see the evil of sin, or the beauty of holiness, or the desirableness of being renewed. The Lord can take away these scales. Oh, that the Lord would cause you to see sin in its true colours, and holiness in its own splendour! Or it may be that unbelief darkens your soul. Those who will not believe cannot see the salvation of God. What a difference is made by divine illumination! A moment ago the man was in the dark, and now he is brought into marvellous light. He was not in the dark because the sun was set or the shutters were closed, but because he was blind. What matters how bright the day when the eyes are sealed? If the light that is in us is darkness, no outward light can avail us. Jesus came on purpose to give eyes to the blind, and by a single word of the preacher, or a text of Scripture, or a verse of a hymn, the Lord can cause the darkened mind

to enter upon the life of light and discernment—"The eyes of your understanding being enlightened."

The next thing which the minister is made to do is *conversion:* Paul was sent "to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." Much depends upon the direction in which a man's face is turned. Here stands a blind man with his face to the darkness: if he goes forward he advances into blacker night; how needful then is that work of the blessed Spirit by which men are turned completely round, and their front is reversed! The darkness is now behind the convert, and the light is on ahead, so that every step he takes he advances towards the light, which increases upon his vision as he nears it. He loves light, he seeks it, he sighs to get nearer and nearer to it: he runs towards it that he may read everything by its aid, and he turns away from darkness, which is now dreaded by him as an Egyptian plague. He has not received all the light he desires; but one thing he knows—whereas he was once blind he now sees. What a blessed turning is that which makes us face truth, and goodness, and God, and heaven; and leave ignorance, sin, and hell behind. The soul is brought into a new element: light is its life, in which alone it flourishes and bears fruit; darkness is its death in which it shivers, pines, and withers.

As the soul is brought into a new element, so is it also brought under a new government. Translation has taken place: the man is translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, or, as our text has it, "from the power of Satan unto God." Notice, the man is turned "from the power of Satan," the tyrannic dominion, and crushing grasp of the evil, cunning, malicious, hateful prince of fallen angels. Once he was hopelessly under that power, but now he has clean escaped from the slavery of the devil, and has come into the liberty of a child of God. To the Lord whom he had forgotten he has turned, so that he thinks of him, cares for him, trusts in him. His heart, his desire, his longing, his hope, all look toward his Saviour; he longs to become more and more like his God, and to enjoy more and more the favour of the great Father. What a blessed turning this,—from the power of Satan to the power of God! Happy are the men who are the means of converting their fellows in this fashion!

Somebody says, "Well, I know there is such a fact as conversion, but I do not understand how it can be performed in a minute." I reply that I do not understand how regeneration, which is the secret cause of conversion, could occupy so long as a minute. Should not goodness rule at once? Two men are fighting, and we beg them to leave off. Do you recommend them to leave off gradually! Shall they take an hour or two over it? Why, they might kill one another in that time. A fire is about to consume your house—do you say to the firemen, "Get it out gradually"? If my house were on fire I should long to see the flame quenched at once. If anybody held a pistol at my head I should not say, "Take it away by degrees." I would wish him to remove the revolver at once. Yet all these things are matters which could be prolonged over a space of time without such risk as would be involved in a slow process of conversion. Changes of mind such as are necessary to conversion had need be quick when sin is to be forsaken, for every moment deepens the guilt. I grant you that in many persons con-

version appears to be gradual, and many things lead up to it as by an inclined plane; but as to the new birth and the reception of the divine life, there is a distinct line of demarkation—on that side of the line all is death, and on this side of it all is life. I cannot tell you when any one man crosses that line, but there must be an instant when he does so. It may seem a very gradual process by which a man who was dead comes to life; but for certain there is a point at which he left the dead and became alive, and that point God sees very clearly even though we do not. Life to the body may at first be perceived only by some painful tingling sensation, or a gentle attempt at breathing; but there is a sharp division between life and death though we may not perceive it. The outward appearance of life may become gradually visible; but there must be an instant, and no more, in which life enters and death ends. Conversion may be effected by the power of the Holy Spirit in less time than it takes me to tell you of it. The man being regenerated straightway turns to his God. Oh, that the Lord would work such a marvel of power here under our eyes. It can be done. I preach with the full conviction that it will be done. He who turned me to himself has sent me to turn others in the name of Jesus by the power of his Spirit.

Together with conversion comes *complete forgiveness.* Read the passage—"that they may receive forgiveness of sins." When a man turns to God it is a proof that God has turned to him. When he hates his sins the Lord has put them away; as soon as ever he confesses and forsakes them they are blotted out for ever. The complete turning of his mind from darkness to light is a proof to the convert that God the righteous Judge has turned away his wrath from him. When the love of sin has gone the guilt of sin has gone also. Full conversion carries with it full pardon. The same moment that we receive Christ we "receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified." Think of that: Oh, that you may know all that it means! What a blessing to become an heir of God! Yet in the moment of forgiveness we receive power to become the sons of God. We are put among the children, and the children's portion is our portion. All that belongs to the sanctified belongs to you, poor sinner, the moment you turn to God, through faith in Christ Jesus: ay, all that belongs to the glorified belongs to you; for, though as yet you cannot pass the golden gate, nor join in the celestial song, yet the glory is yours, reserved for you till the day of God's appointment. Wherefore be of good cheer; if you are indeed turned from darkness to light you have obtained an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified, and what more do you want? To what choice company is a sinner introduced when he believes in Jesus! He was only fit to herd with the profane, or to make his bed in hell with devils; but now he obtains an inheritance among all them that are sanctified: he is a freeholder among the burgesses of the New Jerusalem. What a wonderful procession it would be if all those who are sanctified could pass before us now! Martyrs—their noble army; confessors—their goodly fellowship; prophets and apostles and ministers of the word, of whom the world was not worthy. What a joy to be numbered among them! We are so numbered as soon as we take upon ourselves to trust ourselves with Jesus. We are akin to the perfect! Where they dwell we dwell, where they die we shall die, and where they

live for ever we shall live, for our inheritance is with all them that are sanctified. Oh, brethren, it is worth living, is it not, to become servants of God in any form, so as to introduce our poor sinful fellows into such society as this? May the Lord prepare all believers to deliver the life-giving message, that they may bring many heirs of wrath to be heirs of heaven.

And all this has for its certificate and mark of genuineness these words—"*By faith that is in me.*" Those words are not merely appended to sanctification, though it is worth noticing that sanctification is by faith, since so many look at it as if it were by effort rather than by believing. But the whole process of salvation is by faith. The preacher is to preach in faith. Dear friends, you that teach in the Sunday-school, do you always teach in faith, believing that God will save your children? You, dear brethren, that are going to hold a service in the streets, are you going to do it in faith? If not, you need not do it all, because nothing will come of it. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and if he is not pleased with what you do no saving result can follow. All work is true when it is wrought by faith in Jesus. Men's eyes are opened through their believing in Jesus—that is the great means of illumination. They are turned from darkness to light by God's giving them faith in Jesus. By faith they receive forgiveness of sins, and the divine inheritance. It is all of faith from first to last. May God work it in your souls.

I feel pleased at times to dig down to the old granite formation which underlies the gospel. You know there are certain topsoil truths which we have to plough, and out of which we raise harvests for the Lord; but every now and then, when things go rather hard with our little farm, I like to dig down to the underlying rock. Salvation is of the Lord; and he is omnipotent, and works out his eternal purposes. The child of God can get oil out of this flinty rock: for God will save his own elect, and all the sceptics in the world cannot prevent the operations of the Holy Ghost from being effectual. His purpose shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. His miracles of grace shall be wrought, and not all the devils in hell shall be able to prevent it. Neither sceptics nor fiends can hinder, even for a moment, the eternal purpose of God which must and shall be fulfilled; and this is it, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." This work in the hearts of men he must and will carry on to his own praise and glory—let who will say him nay.

III. Now, I close by the last point, which is A WORK WHICH MUST BE DONE BY THE HEARER HIMSELF. This text speaks of Paul being an instrument in the hands of God of opening men's eyes and turning them to God, that they may receive pardon, and so forth, in all which they seem to be passive: but in this later verse they are called upon to be active—"That they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Paul was commanded to go and do such and such things in the power of the Spirit; but when he commenced to do them it was by telling men that they should repent. God gives repentance, but men must themselves repent. We are created thinking, intelligent beings, and we are saved as such. If we were blocks of wood or masses of iron, God could carve or mould us most readily, and then he would

have done no more than men commonly do with such materials; but if we remain free agents, and yet the Lord works his will upon us, it is an amazing miracle, worthy of the Lord who works it. Never let us forget either the free agency of man or the purposes of God. God leaves us free agents, and yet in infinite wisdom he accomplishes his purposes and fulfils his decree. Grace reigns not over slaves, but over obedient children. The will of the Lord is done, and yet the responsibility and freedom of men are left untouched. How the Lord does this I do not know; he has never deigned to explain his infinity to us, nor need we desire that he should. It is a great blessing to have something to wonder at. I had rather have reasons for adoration than temptations for indulging my pride.

Dear hearer, if you would be saved, you must *repent*. It is not the work of God the Holy Ghost to repent for you, but to lead *you* to repent. The Holy Ghost has nothing to repent of, and it is not a work which can be done by proxy. We cannot give you repentance as a doctor may inject morphia under the skin; it must be your own act and deed, your own feeling and emotion. You cannot be saved unless you personally turn from sin: it is the work of God's Holy Spirit to bring you so to do, but you have to repent with your own heart and mind. Observe this carefully. You have sinned, and you must repent of it and turn from it. You must undergo a change in your mind about everything. You think little of sin—you must thoroughly change your mind on that matter. You think little of Christ—your mind must be totally changed upon that point. You must loathe sin and grieve over it; there can be no forgiveness unless there is a confessing and forsaking of sin. Remember your child's verse and attend to it—

> "Repentance is to leave
> The sins we loved before;
> And show that we in earnest grieve
> By doing so no more."

This is demanded of you by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

The next thing necessary is that you *turn to God*. Your prayer may be, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned," but the command is, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" God will turn you, but you have willingly to yield, and thus turn yourself. A number of texts indicate that there can be no turning of a man's heart to God by any force put upon him; the turning which God grants us is a perfectly willing and delighted turning on our part; we do it as freely as if there was no such thing as the grace of God operating upon us, and yet we do it because grace is sweetly working in us to will and to do. We cannot take you by the ears and drag you into heaven. No person can be holy unwillingly, or happy unwillingly, or go to heaven unwillingly. The great turn needed is to turn to God. Now you turn away from him, you do not like to think of him: this morning you have heard quite as much as you can bear, and you will try and forget it, and so turn away from God. Would not it be grand news for some of you if there were no God, no law, no judgment to come, no heaven, no hell? It would create

in you a sense of liberty, would it not? But as for some of us, it would be slavery to us and the worst calamity that could possibly happen, for we should have lost our joy, our comfort, our all. O sirs, you must turn to God: thinking of him, trusting him, loving him, longing for him, living for him, delighting in him. Your aversion must be removed by conversion: God the Holy Spirit will work this in you, but you must become willing in the day of his power. What say you to this? If you live and die without this turning, you must be turned into hell; I dare not set before you any other prospect.

And then to conclude, it is added they must *do works meet for repentance;* for wherever there is true faith there will be corresponding works. Now what are "works meet for repentance"? They are such as these—restitution if you have wronged any one, reconciliation if you are at enmity with any one, acknowledgment if you have spoken falsely, giving up of evil habits, and an earnest endeavour to be pure and holy. If you run into temptation wilfully that is not a work fit to go with repentance. If you commit again the sin which you have committed before, and return to it as a dog to its vomit, that is not a work meet for repentance. If you live in neglect of the means of grace, if you disregard the Sabbath, if you neglect prayer, if you omit the study of God's word, these are not works that will agree with repentance. If you live wholly for yourself and your own personal aggrandisement, that is not a work meet for repentance. But if you do indeed repent, you must pray the Lord to change your whole life. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature"; that is the whole of it: you must be new from head to foot, new in every thought and word and deed. The saved man is a creation, and none can create him but God himself. Oh that we may each one of us feel his transforming power, that we may henceforth "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure."

After all, it turns on this, *Will you have Christ or not?* Dear hearers, I would like to press that question home upon you. I pray that you may be enabled to say, "I will put my trust in him; I will at once accept him as my Saviour." I am afraid you get so used to my voice that it does not strike you now as it used to do; but still the truth is the same whoever speaks it. If I talk nonsense, forget it; but if this be truth to which you are listening, I implore you to attend to it. Do not hear it and say, "Oh, yes," and then go away, and think no more of it. May God grant you grace at once really to repent, to turn to God, and to do works meet for repentance, through faith which is in Christ, for his dear name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts xxvi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84 (Part II.), 448, 489.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"MY LORD AND MY GOD."

A Sermon,

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 13TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."—John xx. 28.

WHEN the apostles met on the first Lord's-day after Jesus had risen, Thomas was the only disciple absent out of the eleven; on the second Lord's-day Thomas was there, and he was the only disciple doubting out of the eleven. How much the fact of his doubting was occasioned and helped by the fact of his former absence I cannot say; but still it looks highly probable that had he been there at the first, he would have enjoyed the same experience as the other ten, and would have been able to say as they did, "We have seen the Lord." Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, for we cannot tell what loss we may sustain thereby. Though our Lord may reveal himself to single individuals in solitude as he did to Mary Magdalene, yet he more usually shows himself to two or three, and he delights most of all to come into the assembly of his servants. The Lord seems most at home when, standing in the midst of his people, he says, "Peace be unto you." Let us not fail to meet with our fellow believers. For my part, the assemblies of God's people shall ever be dear to me. Where Jesus pays his frequent visits, there would I be found.

> "My soul shall pray for Zion still,
> While life or breath remains;
> There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
> There God my Saviour reigns."

I know that full many of you can most heartily say the same. Oh, that we may behold the Lord Jesus in the present assembly!

On the second occasion Thomas is present, and he is the only one out of the eleven who is vexed with doubts. He cannot think it possible that the Lord Jesus, who was nailed to the cross, and whose side was pierced, could have really risen from the dead. Observe joyfully the Lord's patience with him. All the others had been doubtful too, and the Lord had gently upbraided them for their unbelief and the hardness of their hearts; but Thomas is not convinced by the tenfold testimony of

his brethren, who each one well deserved his implicit confidence. After the plain way in which the Lord had told his disciples that he should be crucified and would rise again from the dead, they ought to have expected the resurrection; and inasmuch as they did not they were to be blamed: what shall we say of him who in addition to all this had heard the witness of his ten comrades who had actually seen the Lord? Yet there he is, the one doubter, the one sturdy questioner who has laid down most stringent requirements as to the only way in which he will be brought to believe. Will not his Lord be provoked by his obstinacy? See how patient Jesus is! If we had been in that case, and had died for those people, and had passed through the grave, and risen again for them, we should have felt very greatly grieved and somewhat angered if they had refused to believe in what we had done; but our Lord shows no such sign; he is tender among them as a nursing father. He rebukes their unbelief: for that was needful for their sakes; but he manifests no vexation of spirit. Especially on this occasion he shows his tenderness toward Thomas, and addresses his first words to him. If Thomas will not be convinced except by what I must call the most gross and materialistic evidence, he will give him such evidence: if he must put his finger into the print of the nails, he shall put his finger there; if he must thrust his hand into his side, he shall be permitted to take that liberty. Oh, see how Jesus condescends to the weaknesses and even to the follies of his people! If we are unbelieving it is not his fault; for he goes out of his way to teach us faith, and sometimes he even gives what we have no right to ask, what we have no reason to expect, what it was even sin in us to have desired. We are so weak, so ignorant, so prone to unbelief that he will do anything to create, sustain, and strengthen our faith in him. He condescends to men of low estate. If through our own folly we are such babes that we cannot eat the meat which is fit food for men, our Lord will not grow weary of giving us milk, but he will even break the bread into morsels, and take away the hard crusts, that we may be able to feed thereon. It is not his will that one of his little ones should perish; and therefore he chases away unbelief, which is their deadliest foe.

Our Lord had special reasons for turning as he did to Thomas that day, and for taking so much trouble to bring Thomas out of his unbelieving condition. The reason must have been, surely, first, that he desired to make of Thomas a most convincing witness to the reality of his resurrection. Here is a man who is determined not to be deceived; let him come and use the tests of his own choice. If you tell me that the resurrection of our Lord from the dead was witnessed by men who were prepared to believe it, I reply that the statement is totally false. Not one among that company even knew the meaning of the Lord's prophecy that he would rise again from the dead. It was hard to make any of them catch the idea; it was so foreign to their thought, so far above their expectation. In Thomas we have a man who was specially hard to be convinced, a man who was so obstinate as to give the lie to ten of his friends with whom he had been associated for years. Now, if I had a statement to make which I wished to have well attested, I should like to place in the witness-box a person who was known to be exceedingly cautious and wary. I should be glad if it were known that

at the first he had been suspicious and critical, but had at length been overwhelmed by evidence so as to be compelled to believe. I am sure that such a man would give his evidence with the accent of conviction, as indeed Thomas did when he cried, "My Lord and my God." We cannot have a better witness to the fact that the Lord is risen indeed than that this cool, examining, prudent, critical Thomas arrived at an absolute certainty.

Further, I conceive that our Lord thus personally dealt with Thomas because he would have us see that he will not lose even one of those whom the Father has given him. The good Shepherd will leave the ninety and nine to seek the one wanderer. If Thomas is the most unbelieving, Thomas shall have the most care. He is only one, but yet he is one, and the Lord Jesus will not lose one whom he has ordained to save. You and I might have said, "Well, if he will not be convinced, we must let him alone; he is only one—we can do without his testimony; we cannot be for ever seeking a solitary individual; let him go." Thus might we have done; but thus Jesus will not do. Our good Shepherd looks after the units; he is tenderly observant of each separate individual, and this is a ground of comfort to us all. If one sheep be lost, why not the whole flock? If one be thus cared for, all will be cared for.

This note is also to be heard in reference to this matter:—After all, it is to be feared that the dull, the slow, the questioning, the anxious, the weak in faith, make up a very considerable part of the church: I do not know that they are in the majority, but they are certainly far too numerous. If all Christians were arranged and classified, I fear we could not many of us place ourselves in the front rank; but a large portion would have to go among the Little-faiths. Our Lord here shows us that he has a condescending care for those who lag behind. Thomas is a week behind everybody else, yet his Lord has not lost patience, but waiteth to be gracious. The other ten apostles have all seen the Lord, and been well assured of his resurrection for the last seven days; but that is no reason why the late-comer should be left out in the cold. Our Lord does not leave the rear rank to perish. We know that in the wilderness the Amalekites slew the hindmost of the children of Israel; but when King Jesus heads the army, no Amalekites shall smite even the hindmost of his people, for the glory of the Lord shall bring up the rear. The walls of Zion enclose babes as well as veterans; the ark of our salvation preserves mice as well as bullocks; our Solomon speaks of the hyssop on the wall as well as of the cedar in Lebanon; and the glory of the Lord may be seen in the preservation of the glowworm's lamp as truly as in the sustenance of the furnace of the sun.

Now, if there should be any in this assembly who honestly have to put themselves down in the sick list, I beg them to take comfort while I try and set forth the experience of Thomas and what came of it. First, I shall call your attention to *the exclamation of Thomas*, "My Lord and my God": secondly, we will consider, *how he came to it;* and thirdly, *how we come to it;* for I trust many of us have also cried, "My Lord and my God."

I. Let us consider THE EXCLAMATION OF THOMAS, "My Lord and

my God." This is a most plain and hearty confession of the true and proper Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is as much as a man could say if he wished to assert indisputably and dogmatically that Jesus is indeed God and Lord. We find David saying, "O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God," and in another place (Psalm xxxv. 23) he says, "My God and my Lord," terms only applicable to Jehovah. Such expressions were known to Thomas, and he as an Israelite would never have applied them to any person whom he did not believe to be God. We are sure therefore that it was the belief of Thomas that the risen Saviour was Lord and God. If this had been a mistake, the Lord Jesus would have rebuked him, for he would not have allowed him to be guilty of worshipping a mere man. No good man among us would permit a person to call him God and Lord; we should feel like Paul and Barnabas when they rent their clothes because the men of Lystra were ready to do sacrifice to them; how much more would the holy Jesus have felt a revolting of spirit against the idea of being worshipped and called "My Lord and my God" if he had not been of such a nature that he "thought it not robbery to be equal with God!" The perfect Jesus accepted divine homage, and therefore we are assured that it was rightly and properly given, and we do here at this moment offer him the like adoration.

To escape from the force of this confession, some who denied our Lord's Deity in olden times had the effrontery to charge Thomas with breaking the third commandment by uttering such a cry of surprise as is common among profane talkers. Just as thoughtless persons take the Lord's name in vain and say, "Good God!" or "O Lord!" when they are much astonished, so certain ancient heretics dared to interpret these words —"My Lord and my God." It is clear to any thoughtful person that this could not have been the case. For, in the first place, it was not the habit of a Jew to use any such exclamation when surprised or amazed. An irreligious Gentile might have done so, but it was the last thing that would occur to a devout Israelite. If there is one thing about which the Jews in our Lord's times were particular beyond everything, it was about using the name of God. Why, even in their sacred books they have omitted the word "Jehovah," and have only written "Adonai," because of a superstitious reverence for the very letters of the divine name. How can we, then, believe that Thomas would have done what no Jew at that time would have dreamed of? Israel after the Babylonian captivity had many faults, but not that of idolatry or irreverence to the divine name. I do not know what an Israelite might have said under the influence of a great surprise, but I am absolutely certain that he would not have said, "My Lord and my God." In the next place, it could not have been a mere exclamation of surprise, or an irreverent utterance, because it was not rebuked by our Lord, and we may be sure he would not have suffered such an unhallowed cry to have gone without a reprimand. Observe, too, that it was addressed to the Lord Jesus,—"Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God." It was not a mere outburst of surprise addressed to no one, but it was an answer directed to the Lord who had spoken to him. It was also such a reply that our Lord Jesus Christ accepted it as an evidence of faith, for in the twenty-ninth verse he says, "Thou hast believed,"

and that confession was the only evidence of his believing which our Lord had received from Thomas. A mere outcry of confused astonishment in irreverent words would never have been received as a satisfactory proof of faith. Sin is not an evidence of faith. The slander proposed by the Arian must, therefore, be rejected with derision. I am almost ashamed to have mentioned it, but in these days, when every kind of error is rife, it is needful to bring to light and break in pieces many idols which we had rather have left with the moles and bats.

I regard this cry of Thomas, first, as *a devout expression of that holy wonder* which came upon him when his heart made the great discovery that Jesus was assuredly his Lord and God. It had flashed upon the mind of Thomas that this august person whom he had regarded as the Messiah was also God. He saw that the man at whose feet he had sat was more than man, and was assuredly God, and this amazed him so that he used broken speech. He does not say, "Thou art my Lord and my God," as a man would say who is making a doctrinal statement, but he brings it out in fragments, he makes adoration of it, he cries in ecstacy, "My Lord and my God." He is amazed at the discovery which he has made, and probably also at the fact that he has not seen it long before. Why, he might have known it, and ought to have perceived it years before! Had he not been present when Jesus trod the sea? when he hushed the winds, and bade the waters sleep? Had he not seen him open the blind eyes, and unstop the deaf ears? Why did he not cry, "My Lord and my God," then? Thomas had been slow to learn, and the Lord might have said to him, as he did to Philip, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?" Now on a sudden he does know his Lord—knows him to such a surprising extent that such knowledge is too wonderful for him. He had come to the meeting to prove whether he who appeared to his brethren was the same man who had died on Calvary, but now he seems to have forgotten that original question; it is more than answered, it has ceased to be a question; he is carried far further by the flood of evidence, he is landed in a full belief of the Godhead of Jesus. He spies out within that wounded body the indwelling Godhead, and at a leap he springs beyond the conviction that it is the same man to the firm assurance that Jesus is God; and consequently in broken accents, but with double assurance, he cries, "My Lord and my God." My brethren, how I wish you would all follow Thomas this morning! I will stop a minute that you may do so. Let us wonder and admire! He that had not where to lay his head, he that suffered scourging and spitting, and died on Calvary, is nevertheless God over all, blessed for ever. He who was laid in the tomb liveth and reigneth, King of kings and Lord of lords. Hallelujah! Behold, he cometh in the glory of the Father to judge the quick and the dead. Let your spirits drink in that truth, and be amazed at it. If the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, suffered and bled, and died for you, never astonishes you, I fear that you do not believe it, or have no intelligent apprehension of the full meaning of it. Angels wonder, should not you? Oh, let us feel a holy surprise to-day, as we realize the truth that he who has redeemed us from our sins by his blood is the Son of the Highest!

Next, I believe that this was an expression of *immeasurable delight;*

for you observe he does not say, "Lord and God," but, "My Lord and my God." He seems to take hold of the Lord Jesus with both hands, by those two blessed "my's"—"My Lord and my God." Oh, the joy that flashed from the eyes of Thomas at that moment! How quickly his heart beat! He had never known such joy as at that instant, and though he must have felt deeply humbled, yet in that humiliation there was an excessive sweetness of intense satisfaction as he looked at his divine Lord and gazed on him, from the pierced feet up to the brow so marred with the crown of thorns, and said, "My Lord and my God." There is in these few words a music akin to the sonnet of the spouse in the Canticles when she sang, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." The enraptured disciple saw the friend of his heart standing before him, shining upon him in love, and knitting his heart to him. I pray you follow Thomas in this joy in Christ. I pause a minute that you may do so. Before you Jesus now stands, visible to your faith. Delight yourselves in him. Be always ravished with his love. He is altogether lovely, and altogether yours. He loves you with all the infinity of his nature. The tenderness of his humanity and the majesty of his Deity blend in his love to you. Oh, love the Lord, ye his saints, for he deserves your hearts! Therefore at this moment say, "My Lord and my God."

More than this, I believe that the words of Thomas indicate *a complete change of mind*—in other words, a most hearty repentance. He has not asked of the Lord Jesus to be permitted to put his finger into the print of the nails. No, all that has gone without debate. If you look at the chapter you will find no statement that he ever did handle the Lord as he had at first proposed. Whether he did put his finger into the print of the nails, and his hand into the side, must for ever be unknown to us until we see Thomas in heaven and ask him the question. If you read the Saviour's words as commanding him to do so, then we may conclude that he did so; but if you read them as only permitting him to do it, then I think he did not do it. I put the question to a dear companion of mine; I read the passage, and then I asked, "What think you, did Thomas put his hand into Christ's side?" and the answer from a thoughtful mind and a gentle heart was this—"I do not think he could; after the Master had so spoken to him he would shrink from doing so, and would think it wilful unbelief to attempt it." This reply coincided exactly with my own convictions. I feel sure that had it been my case I should have felt so ashamed at ever having proposed such a test, and so overwhelmed to find the Lord yielding to it, that I could not have gone an inch further in the way of seeking tokens and proofs unless I had been absolutely commanded to do so. So, judging Thomas to be like ourselves, and indeed much better than any of us, notwithstanding his imperfection, I gather that he completely turned round, and instead of putting his finger into the print of the nails, he cried, "My Lord and my God." The Saviour said to him, "Because thou hast *seen* me, thou hast believed." Now, I lay no stress upon it; but it would seem probable that the Saviour might have said, "Because thou hast touched me thou hast believed," if Thomas had indeed touched him; but inasmuch as he only speaks of sight, it may be that sight was enough for Thomas. I do not insist upon it, but I think

it right to suggest it; I feel it is not unreasonable to conclude that all Thomas did was to look at his Lord. He could do no more; the delicacy of his spirit would not permit him to accept the offered test; his reverence checked him; he saw and believed. In him we see a complete change of feeling; from being the most unbelieving of the eleven, he came to believe more than any of them, and to confess Jesus to be God.

This exclamation is also *a brief confession of faith*, "My Lord and my God." Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he be able to unite with Thomas heartily in this creed, "My Lord and my God." I do not go in for all the minute distinctions of the Athanasian Creed, but I have no doubt that it was absolutely needful at the time it was written, and that it materially helped to check the evasions and tricks of the Arians. This short creed of Thomas I like much better, for it is brief, pithy, full, sententious, and it avoids those matters of detail which are the quicksands of faith. Such a belief is needful; but no man can truly hold it unless he be taught by the Holy Ghost. He can say the words, but he cannot receive the spiritual truth. No man can call Jesus "Lord" but by the Holy Ghost. It is therefore a most needful and saving creed that we should cry to the Lord Jesus, "My Lord and my God." I ask you to do this now in your hearts. Renew your faith, and confess that he who died for you is your Lord and God. Socinians may call Jesus what they please; to me he is God over all, blessed for ever. I know that you say, "Amen."

Further than this, do you not think that these words of Thomas were *an enthusiastic profession of his allegiance* to Christ? "My Lord and my God." It was as though he paid him lowliest homage, and dedicated himself there and then in the entirety of his nature to his service. To him whom he had once doubted he now submits himself, for in him he fully believes. He does as good as say, "Henceforth, O Christ, thou art my Lord, and I will serve thee; thou art my God, and I will worship thee."

Finally, I regard it as *a distinct and direct act of adoration.* At the feet of the manifested Saviour, Thomas cries, "My Lord and my God." It sounds like a rehearsal of the eternal song which ascends before that throne where cherubim and seraphim continually do cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." It sounds like a stray note from those choral symphonies which day without night circle the throne of the Eternal. Let us in solemn silence now present our souls before the throne, bowing in reverent adoration unto him that was, and is, and is to come, even the Lamb that was slain, who is risen, and who liveth for ever. "My Lord and my God." O Son of Mary, thou art also Son of the Highest, and unto my heart and spirit thou art my Lord and my God, and I worship thee this day! We have not time or else I would sit down and invite you to spend a few minutes in private, personal worship, following the example of Thomas in adoring our Lord and God.

II. Our next division is to be headed with the question—How DID HE COME TO THAT EXCLAMATION? Have you ever thought what Thomas's feelings were when he went to the meeting that evening? His going needed a complicated explanation. Why did he mingle with men

whose solemn assertions he doubted? Could he have fellowship with them, and yet give them the lie? Suppose Jesus Christ to be dead, and not risen, why does Thomas go? Is he going to worship a dead man? Is he about to renounce the faith of the last two years? How can he hold it if Jesus is not alive? Yet how can he give it up? Was Jesus Christ Lord and God to Thomas when he first entered that meeting? I suppose not. He did not, when he entered the room, believe him to be the same person who had died. The other disciples did believe, and Thomas was now the lone doubter, peculiar, positive, obstinate. Has it never happened to other disciples to drift into much the same condition? Thomas was a lot out of catalogue that evening: he was the odd person in the little gathering, and yet before service was over the Lord had completely altered him. "Behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last."

The first thing, I think, that led Thomas to this confession of his belief in Christ's Deity was that *he had his thoughts revealed.* The Saviour came into the room, the doors being shut; without opening the doors he suddenly appeared before them by his own divine power. There and then pointing to Thomas he repeated to him the very words which Thomas had said to his brethren. They had not been reported to the Saviour, but the Saviour had read Thomas's thoughts at a distance, and he was therefore able to bring before him his exact words. Notice that the Saviour did not say, "Stoop down and put thy finger into the nail-prints in my feet." Why not? Why, because Thomas had not said anything about his feet, and therefore the Saviour did not mention them. Everything was exact. We in looking at it can see the exactness; but Thomas must have felt it much more. He was overwhelmed. To have his thoughts put in plain words, and to hear his own words repeated by him whom they concerned, this was truly wonderful. "Oh," saith he, "he who now speaks to me is none other than God, and he shall be my Lord and my God." This helped him to his assured conviction that one who had read his thoughts must be God.

He was aided still further, for as soon as he perceived that this was the same Jesus with whom he had conversed before, *all the past must have risen before his mind,* and he must have remembered the many occasions in which the Lord Jesus had exercised the attributes of Deity. That past intercourse thus revived before him must all have gone to support the conviction that Jesus was none other than Lord and God.

And then, methinks, *the very air, and manner, and presence of the Saviour* convinced the trembling disciple. They say there is a divinity that doth hedge a king; that I am not prepared to believe; but I am sure there was a majesty about the look of our Lord, a more than human dignity in his manner and tone, and speech and bearing. Our Lord's personal presence convinced Thomas: so that he saw and believed.

But perhaps the most convincing arguments of all were *our Lord's wounds.* It seems a long way round to infer the Deity of Christ from his wounds: yet it is good and clear argument. I shall not set it out in order before you, but leave you to think it out for yourselves, yet one little hint I would give you: here is a wound in his side more than sufficient to have caused death; it has gone right to the heart; the soldier with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith flowed there out blood and

water, proving that the heart was pierced. The opening was still there, for the Lord invited Thomas to thrust his hand into his side, and yet Jesus lived. Heard ye ever such a story as this?—a man with a death-wound gaping wide inviting another to thrust his hand therein. Had our Lord been living after the way in which we live, by the circulation of the blood, one can hardly see how this could have been possible. *Flesh and blood,* being subject to corruption, cannot inherit the kingdom of God; but the Saviour's risen body came not under that description, as indeed his buried body did not, for he saw no corruption. I invite you to note well the distinction which may be seen in our Lord's words concerning his own body; he does not speak of his body as flesh *and blood,* but he says, "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not *flesh and bones* as ye see me have." It was a real body and a material body: for he took a piece of a broiled fish and of a honey-comb, and did eat before them; but still his resurrection body, living with an open wound in his side, reaching to the heart, was not after the manner of men. So even in the wounds of Christ, we read that he is man, but not mere man: his wounds in various ways were evidence to Thomas of his Deity. Anyhow, the glorious fact rushed upon Thomas's astonished mind in a single moment, and therefore he cried out, "My Lord and my God."

III. Finally, let us see HOW WE MAY COME TO IT. That is our final point, and the most practical of all. I doubt not that the Spirit of God was at work with Thomas at that time very mightily, and that the true cause of his enlightenment was heavenly illumination. If ever any one of us shall cry in spirit and in truth, "My Lord and my God!" the Holy Spirit must teach us. Blessed art thou who can call Jesus "Lord and God," for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but the Father from heaven.

But I will tell you when believers do cry, "My Lord and my God." I remember the first time it filled my heart. Burdened with guilt, and full of fears, I was as wretched as a man could be outside of hell-gate, when I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." I did look there and then; I gave a faith-glance to him who suffered in my stead, and in an instant my peace was like a river. My heart leaped from despair to gladness, and I knew my Lord to be divine. If any one had said to me then, "Jesus Christ is not God," I would have laughed him to scorn. He was beyond all question my Lord and my God, for he had wrought a divine work in me.

It may not be an argument to anybody else, but forgiveness consciously known in the soul is a conclusive argument to the man who has ever felt it. If the Lord Jesus turns your mourning into dancing, brings you up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay, and sets your feet upon a rock and establishes your goings, he is sure to be your Lord and God henceforth and for ever. In the teeth of all that deny it, in the teeth of all the devils in hell, the redeemed heart will assert the Godhead of its Saviour. He that hath saved me is indeed God, and beside him there is none else.

This first avowal has proved to be only the beginning of these confessions. We remember many other acknowledgments of the same fact. We were severely tempted, and yet we did not slip, nor stain our

garments. What a wonder that we escaped! He that kept us from falling must be God. I know some moments in my life when I could stand and look back in the morning-light upon the valley through which I had passed in the dark; and when I saw how narrow the pathway was, how a little step to the left or to the right must have been my total destruction, and yet I had never tripped, but had come straight through in perfect safety, I was astounded, and bowing my head I worshipped, saying, "The Lord has been my refuge and my defence. He has kept my soul in life and preserved me from the destroyer, therefore will I sing songs unto him as long as I live." Oh, yes, dear children of God, when your heads have been covered in the day of battle, you have magnified the Keeper of Israel, saying, "My Lord and my God." We have felt that we could not doubt again, and have joyfully committed ourselves to his keeping as to the guardian care of a faithful Creator.

Such, also, has been the case in time of trouble, when you have been comforted and upheld. A very heavy affliction has fallen upon you, and yet to your surprise it has not crushed you as you feared it would have done. Years before you had looked forward to the stroke with agonizing apprehension, and said, "I shall never bear it;" but you did bear it, and at this moment you are thankful that you had it to bear. The thing which you feared came upon you, and when it came it seemed like a feather weight compared with what you expected it to be; you were able to sit down and say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Your friends were surprised at you: you had been a poor, wretchedly nervous creature before, but in the time of trial you displayed a singular strength such as surprised everybody. Most of all you surprised yourself, for you were full of amazement that in weakness you were made so strong. You said, "I was brought low, and he helped me." You could not doubt his Deity then: anything which would rob him of glory you detested, for your heart said, "Lord, there is none that could have solaced my soul in this fashion save only the Lord God Almighty." Personally I have had to cry out, "It is the Lord!" when I have seen his wonders in the deep. "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength." My soul shall magnify my Lord and my God, for "he sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters. He brought me forth also into a large place: he delivered me, because he delighted in me."

There have been other occasions less trying. Bear with me if I mention one or two more. When we have been musing, the fire has burned. While studying the story of our Lord, our faith in his Deity has been intensified. When the Spirit of God has revealed the Lord Jesus to us and in us, then we have cried, "My Lord and my God." Though not after the flesh, yet in very deed and truth we have seen the Lord. On a day which I had given up to prayer, I sat before the Lord in holy peacefulness, wrapped in solemn contemplation, and though I did not see a vision, nor wish to see one, yet I so realized my Master's presence that I was borne away from all earthly things, and knew of no man save Jesus only. Then a sense of his Godhead filled me till I would fain have stood up where I was and have proclaimed aloud, as with the voice of a trumpet, that he was my Lord and my God. Such times you also have known.

Jesus is often known of us in the breaking of bread. At the communion-table many a time we have seen and adored. It was very precious; we were ready to weep and laugh for joy. Our heart kept beating to the tune of "My Lord and my God." Perhaps it was not in any outward ordinance that your soul thus adored; but quite away in the country, or by the seaside, as you walked along and communed with your own heart, you were suddenly overpowered with a sense of Jesus' glorious majesty, so that you could only whisper to yourself as in a still small voice, "My Lord and my God." Or perhaps it was when you were laid aside with illness that he made all your bed, and then you knew his power divine. It was a long and weary night to those who watched you, but to you it was all too short, and brimmed with sweetness, for the Lord was there, and he gave you songs in the night. When you awoke you were still with him and felt ready to faint with overwhelming delight because of the brightness of the manifestation. At such a time you could have sung,

"My Christ, he is the Lord of lords,
He is the King of kings;
He is the Sun of righteousness,
With healing in his wings.

"My Christ, he is the heaven of heavens,
My Christ, what shall I call?
My Christ is first, my Christ is last,
My Christ is All in all."

I will tell you yet again when Jesus has been Lord and God both to me and to you, and that is in times when he has blessed our labours, and laid his arm bare in the salvation of men. When our report has been believed by those who rejected it before, and the Lord has sent us a happy season of revival, we have given to him the glory, and rejoiced in his omnipotent love. We prayed for our children, and when to our surprise—it is a shame to say to our surprise, for it ought not to have surprised us—the Lord heard our prayer, and first one and then another came to us and said, "Father, I have found the Lord," then we knew that the Lord he is God, and our God too. We looked up from our poor prayers with tears in our eyes to think the Lord Jesus could have heard such weak petitions, and we said in the depths of our hearts, "My Lord and my God." We went out and tried to teach a dozen or two in a cottage—poor, broken words were all that we could utter; but the Lord blessed it, and we heard a poor woman crying for mercy as we came out, and we said inwardly, "My Lord and my God." If you have been in the Enquiry-room after some brother whom God greatly honours has been proclaiming the word with power, and if you have seen the people falling right and left under the shafts of the divine word, you must have cried, "This is no cunningly devised fable, no fiction, and no fancy," and your heart must have throbbed with all its life, "My Lord and my God." Have you not felt as if you would dare to go through the very streets of hell, and tell the grinning fiends that Christ is King and Lord for ever and ever?

The time is very soon coming with some of us when we shall have our last opportunities in this life to find this true. How comforted and

refreshed have I often been when visiting dying saints. Truly the Lord has prepared a table for them in the presence of the last enemy. I can truly say that no scenes that these eyes have ever beheld have so gladdened me as the sight of my dear brethren and sisters when they have been departing out of the world unto the Father. The saddest scene has been the happiest. I have known some of them in life as self-distrusting, trembling, lowly-minded believers; and when they have come into the valley of death-shade they have displayed no fear, no doubt, but all has been full assurance. Placid, calm, beautiful, joyful, and even triumphant have been the last hours of timid believers. As I have heard their charming words I have been certain of the Godhead of him who gives us victory while we die. It is faith in his name that makes men strong in death. When heart and flesh fail us, only the living God can be the strength of our life, and our portion for ever. How sweet to know Jesus as our living God in our dying moments! In him we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, as we say unto him in death, "My Lord and my God." Come, brothers and sisters, be of good cheer! A little further on we shall come to the narrow stream. This we shall cross in an instant, and then———! It will be but a short, short time; twenty years is soon gone, a hundred years even fly as on eagles' wings, and then we shall be for ever with the Lord in the glory land. How sweetly will we sing to his eternal praise, "My Lord and my God"! There shall be no doubters in heaven; no sceptics shall worry us there; but this shall be the unanimous voice of all the redeemed—"Jesus is our Lord and God." The united church, freed from every spot and wrinkle, and gloriously arrayed as the bride of Christ, shall be conducted to his throne, and acknowledged as the Lord's beloved, and then shall she with full heart exclaim, "My Lord and my God."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xx. 1—29.

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UNBINDING LAZARUS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 20TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."—John xi. 43, 44.

IN many things our Lord Jesus stands alone as a worker. No other can unite his voice with the fiat which says, "Lazarus, come forth." Yet in certain points of gracious operation the Master associates his servants with him, so that when Lazarus has come forth he says *to them*, "Loose him, and let him go." In the raising of the dead he is alone, and therein majestic and divine: in the loosing of the bound he is associated with them, and remains still majestic; but his more prominent feature is condescension. How exceedingly kind it is of our Lord Jesus to permit his disciples to do some little thing in connection with his great deeds, so that they may be "workers together with him." Our Lord as frequently as possible associated his disciples with himself; of course, they could not aid him in presenting an atoning sacrifice, yet it was their honour that they had said, "Let us go that we may die with him," and that in their love they resolved to go with him to prison and to death. Our Lord understood the fickleness of their character, yet he knew that they were sincere in their desire to be associated with him in all his life-story whatever it might be. Hence, when he afterwards rode into Jerusalem in triumph, he alone was saluted with Hosannas; but he sent two of his disciples to bring the ass on which he rode, and they cast their garments upon the colt and they set Jesus thereon, and as he went they spread their clothes in the way. Thus they contributed to his lowly pomp, and shared in the exultation of the royal day. Further on, when he would keep the feast, he expressly dwells upon it that he would keep it with them; for he said, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover *with you* before I suffer." He sent Peter and John to prepare that passover, he directed them to the large upper room furnished, and there he bade them make ready. Anything that they could do they were allowed to do.

Their Lord was willing to have led them further still; but through weakness they stopped short. In the garden he bade them watch with him on that dreadful night, and he sought sympathy from them.

> "Backward and forward, thrice he ran,
> As if he sought some help from man."

He cried in sorrowful disappointment, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" Ah, no! They could go to the brink of the abyss with him, but they could not descend into its deeps. He must tread the winepress alone, and of the people there must be none with him; yet as far as they could go he disdained not their dear society. He allowed them according to their capacity to drink of his cup, and to be baptized with his baptism; and if their fellowship with him in his sufferings went no farther, it was not because he warned them back, but because they had not the strength to follow. According to his own judgment they were intimately associated with him, for he said to them, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations."

Beloved, our Jesus Christ still delights to associate us with him as far as our feebleness and folly will permit. In his present work of bringing sinners to himself, he counts it a part of his reward that we should be labourers together with him. In his working people he beholds the travail of his soul as well as in the sinners whom they bring to him; thus, he has a double reward, and is as much glorified in the love, and pity, and zeal of his servants as in the harvest which they reap. As a father smiles to see his little children imitating him, and endeavouring to assist him in his work, so is Jesus pleased to see our lowly efforts for his honour. It is his joy to see the eyes which he has opened weeping with him over the impenitent, and to hear the tongue which he has loosed speaking in prayer and in the preaching of the gospel; yea, to see any of the members which he has restored and healed occupied as members of righteousness in his service. Jesus is glad to save sinners at all, but most of all glad to save them by the means of those already saved. Thus he blesses the prodigal sons and the servants of the household at the same moment. He gives to the lost salvation, and upon his own called and chosen ones he puts the honour of being used for the grandest purposes under heaven. It is more honourable to save a soul from death than to rule an empire. Such honour all the saints may have.

The chief subject of this morning's discourse is our association with Christ in gracious labour; but we must on the road consider other themes which lead up to it. First, I would call your attention to *a memorable miracle* which was wrought by our Lord in the burying-place at Bethany; secondly, I would set before you *a singular spectacle*, for in Lazarus we see a living man wearing the wrappings of the dead; thirdly, we will learn something from *a timely assistance*, which the friends around lent to the risen man after the Lord had said, "Loose him, and let him go"; and then by way of conclusion, we will note *a practical hint* which this whole subject gives to those who are willing to hear what Christ their Lord will speak to them. Oh, that the Spirit of God may make us quick of understanding to perceive the mind of the Lord,

and then diligent of heart to carry out his will! Come, O blessed Spirit, help thy servant at this hour!

I. First, then, this chapter records A MEMORABLE MIRACLE. Perhaps that writer is correct who speaks of the raising of Lazarus as the most remarkable of all our Lord's mighty works. There is no measuring miracles, for they are all displays of the infinite; but in some respects the raising of Lazarus stands at the head of the wonderful series of miracles with which our Lord astonished and instructed the people. Yet I am not in error when I assert that it is a type of what the Lord Jesus is constantly doing at this hour in the realm of mind and spirit. Did he raise the naturally dead? So doth he still raise the spiritually dead. Did he bring back a body from corruption? So doth he still deliver men from loathsome sins. The life-giving miracle of grace is as truly astounding as the quickening miracle of power. As this was in some respects a more remarkable resurrection than the raising of Jairus's daughter, or of the young man at the gate of Nain, so there are certain conversions and regenerations which are to the observing mind more astonishing than others.

I notice the memorableness of this miracle in *the subject of it*, because the man had been dead four days. To give life to one of whom his own sister said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh," was a deed fragrant with divine power. Corruption had set in, but he who is the resurrection and the life stayed and reversed the process. Probably the sisters had perceived the traces of decay upon the body of their beloved brother before they buried him, for it is more than supposable that they delayed the funeral as long as possible under an undefined hope that perhaps their Lord would appear upon the scene. In that warm climate the ravages of decay are extremely rapid, and before many hours the loving sisters were compelled to admit, as Abraham had done before them, that they must bury their dead out of their sight. It was their full conviction that the terrible devourings of corruption had commenced. What then can be done? When a man has newly fallen asleep in death, and every vein and artery is in its place, and every separate organ is still perfect, it might seem possible for the life-flood again to flow. It somewhat resembles an engine which was but lately in full action, and though it is now motionless, the valves, and wheels, and bands, are still there; only kindle anew the fire, and reapply the motive force, and the machinery will speedily begin to work. But when corruption comes, every valve is displaced, every wheel is broken, every band is severed, the very metal itself is eaten away. What can be done now? Surely it were an easier task to make a new man altogether out of the earth than to take this poor corrupted corpse which has turned to worms' meat and make it live again. This was the stupendous miracle of divine power which our glorious Lord performed upon his friend Lazarus. Now, there are some men who are symbolized by this case: they are not only devoid of all spiritual life, but corruption has set in; their character has become abominable, their language is putrid, their spirit is loathsome. The pure mind desires to have them put out of sight; they cannot be endured in any decent society. They are so far gone from original righteousness as to be an offence to all, and it does not seem possible that ever they should be restored to purity, honesty, or

hope. When the Lord in infinite compassion comes to deal with them and makes them to live, then the most sceptical are obliged to confess, "This is the finger of God!" What can it be else? Such a profane wretch become a believer! Such a blasphemer a man of prayer! Such a proud, conceited talker, receive the kingdom as a little child! Surely God himself must have wrought this marvel! Now is fulfilled the word of the Lord by Ezekiel,—"And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves." We bless our God that he does thus quicken the dry bones, whose hope was lost. However far gone a man may be, he cannot be beyond the reach of the Lord's right arm of mighty mercy. The Lord can change the vilest of the vile into the most holy of the holy! Blessed be his name, we have seen him do this, and therefore we have cheering hope for the worst of men!

The next notable point about this miracle is *the manifest human weakness of its worker*. He who had to deal with this dead man was himself a man. I do not know of any passage of Scripture wherein the manhood of Christ is more frequently manifested than in this narrative. The Godhead is, of course, eminently conspicuous in the resurrection of Lazarus, but the Lord seemed as if he designedly at the same time set his manhood to the front. The Pharisees said, according to the forty-seventh verse, "What do we? for *this man* doeth many miracles." They are to be blamed for denying his Godhead, but not for dwelling upon his manhood, for every part of the singular scene before us made it conspicuous. When our Lord had seen Mary's tears, we read that he groaned in spirit and was troubled. Thus he showed the sorrows and the sympathies of a man. We cannot forget those memorable words, "Jesus wept." Who but a man should weep? Weeping is a human speciality. Jesus never seems to be more completely bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh than when he weeps. Next, our Lord made an enquiry—"Where have ye laid him?" He veils his omniscience: as a man he seeks information—where is the body of his dear departed friend? Even as Mary in after days said about himself, "Tell me where thou hast laid him," so does the Lord Jesus ask for information as a man who knows not. As if to show his manhood even more fully, when they tell him where Lazarus is entombed he goes that way. He needed not to go: he might have spoken a word where he was, and the dead would have risen. Could he not as easily have wrought at a distance as near at hand? Being man, "Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave." When he has reached the spot he sees a cave whose mouth is closed by a huge stone, and now he seeks human assistance. He cries, "Take ye away the stone." Why, surely he who could raise the dead could have rolled away the stone with the self-same word! Yet, as if needing help from those about him, the man Christ Jesus reminds us again of Mary at his own sepulchre, saying, "Who shall roll us away the stone?" That done, our Lord lifts up his eyes to heaven, and addresses the Father in mingled prayer and thanksgiving. How like a man is all this! He takes the suppliant's place. He speaks with God as a man speaketh with his friend, but still as a man. Did not this condescending revelation of the manhood make the miracle all the more remarkable? The time came when the flame of the Godhead flashed

forth from the unconsumed bush of the manhood. The voice of him who wept was heard in the chambers of death-shade, and forth came the soul of Lazarus to live again in the body. "The weakness of God" proved itself to be stronger than death and mightier than the grave. It is a parable of our own case as workers. Sometimes we see the human side of the gospel, and wonder whether it can do many mighty works. When we tell the story, we fear that it will appear to the people as a thrice-told tale. We wonder how it can be that truth so simple, so homely, so common should have any special power about it. Yet it is so. Out of the foolishness of preaching the wisdom of God shines forth. The glory of the eternal God is seen in that gospel which we preach in much trembling and infirmity. Let us therefore glory in our infirmity, because the power of God doth all the more evidently rest upon us. Let us not despise our day of small things, nor be dismayed because we are manifestly so feeble. This work is not for our honour, but for the glory of God, and any circumstance which tends to make that glory more evident is to be rejoiced in.

Let us consider for a few moments *the instrumental cause of this resurrection.* Nothing was used by our Lord but his own word of power. Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" He simply repeated the dead man's name, and added two commanding words. This was a simple business enough. Dear friends, a miracle seems all the greater when the means used are apparently feeble and little adapted to the working of so great a result. It is so in the salvation of men. It is marvellous that such poor preaching should convert such great sinners. Many are turned unto the Lord by the simplest, plainest, most unadorned preaching of the gospel. They hear little, but that little is from the lip of Jesus. Many converts find Christ by a single short sentence. The divine life is borne into their hearts upon the wings of a brief text. The preacher owned no eloquence, he made no attempt at it; but the Holy Spirit spoke through him with a power which eloquence could not rival. Thus said the Lord "Ye dry bones live"; and they did live. I delight to preach my Master's gospel in the plainest terms. I would speak still more simply if I could. I would borrow the language of Daniel concerning Belshazzar's robe of scarlet and his chain of gold, and I would say to rhetoric, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another." The power to quicken the dead lieth not in the wisdom of words but in the Spirit of the living God. The voice is Christ's voice, and the word is the word of him who is the resurrection and the life, and therefore men live by it. Let us rejoice that it is not needful that you and I should become orators in order that the Lord Jesus should speak by us: let the Spirit of God rest upon us, and we shall be endowed with power from on high: so that even the spiritually dead shall through us hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.

The result of the Lord's working must not be passed over, for it is a main element of wonder in this miracle. Lazarus did come forth and that immediately. The thunder of Christ's voice was attended by the lightning of his divine power, and forthwith life flashed into Lazarus and he came forth. Bound as he was, the power which had enabled him to live enabled him to shuffle forth from the ledge of rock whereon he lay, and there he stood with nothing of death about him but his grave-

clothes. He quitted the close air of the sepulchre and returned to know once more the things which are done under the sun; *and that at once.* To me it is one of the great glories of the gospel that it does not require weeks and months to quicken men and make new creatures of them; salvation can come to them at once. The man who stepped into this Tabernacle this morning steeped in rebellion against his God, and apparently impervious to divine truth, may nevertheless go down those steps with his sins forgiven, and with a new spirit imparted to him, in the strength of which he shall begin to live unto God as he never lived before. Do you speak of a nation being born at once, as if it were impossible? It is possible with God. The Divine Power can send a flash of life all round the world at any instant to quicken myriads of his chosen. We are dealing now with God, not with men. Man must have time to prepare his machinery, and get it into going order; but it is not so with the Lord. We, on our part, must seek after a preacher, and find for him a place wherein the people may be gathered; but when the Lord Jesus works, straightway the deed is done, with or without the preacher, and inside or outside the place of assembly! If you and I had to feed five thousand, we should need to grind the corn at the mill, and bake the bread in the oven, and then we should be a long time in bringing the loaves in baskets; but the Master takes the barley cakes and breaks, and as he breaks the food is multiplied. Anon he handles the fish, and lo, it seems as if a shoal had been in his hands instead of "a few small fishes." Behold! the vast multitude receives refreshment from the little stock which has been so abundantly increased. Trust ye in God, my brethren. In all your work of love, trust in the unseen power which lay at the back of the manhood of Christ, and still lies at the back of the simple gospel which we preach. The everlasting word may seem to be weak and feeble; it may groan and weep, and seem as if it could do no more; but it can raise the dead, and raise them at once. Be ye sure of this.

The effect which this miracle produced upon those who looked on was very remarkable, for many believed in the Lord Jesus. Besides this, the miracle of raising Lazarus was so unquestioned and unquestionable a fact that it brought the Pharisees to a point—they would now make an end of Christ. They had huffed and puffed at his former miracles; but this one had struck such a blow that in their wrath they determined that he should die. No doubt this miracle was the immediate cause of the crucifixion of Jesus: it marked a point of decision when men must either believe in Christ, or become his deadly foes. Oh, brethren, if the Lord be with us, we shall see multitudes believing through Jesus; and if the rage of the enemy becomes thereby the more intense, let us not fear it: there will come a last decisive struggle, and mayhap it shall be brought on by some amazing display of the divine power in the conversion of the chief of sinners. Let us hope so; let us not be afraid that Armageddon should be fought, for it will end in victory. We shall see greater things than these!

II. Secondly, I beg you to observe A SINGULAR SPECTACLE. A notable miracle was unquestionably wrought; but it required a finishing touch.

The man was wholly raised, but not wholly freed. See, here is *a living*

man in the garments of death! That napkin and other grave-clothes were altogether congruous with death, but they were much out of place when Lazarus began again to live. It is a wretched sight to see a living man wearing his shroud. Yet we have seen in this Tabernacle hundreds of times people quickened by Divine grace with their grave-clothes still upon them. Such was their condition that unless you observed carefully you would think them still dead; and yet within them the lamp of heavenly life was burning. Some said, "He is dead, look at his garments;" but the more spiritual cried, "He is not dead, but these bands must be loosed." It is a singular spectacle: a living man hampered with the cerements of death!

Moreover, he was *a moving man bound hand and foot.* How he moved I do not know. Some of the old writers thought that he glided, as it were, through the air, and that this was part of the miracle. I think he may have been so bound that though he could not freely walk yet he could shuffle along like a man in a sack. I know that I have seen souls bound and yet moving; moving intensely in one direction, and yet not capable of stirring an inch in another. Have you not seen a man so truly alive that he wept, he mourned, he groaned over sin; but yet he could not believe in Christ, but seemed bound hand and foot as to faith? I have seen him give up his sin determinedly, and crush a bad habit under his foot, and yet he could not lay hold on a promise or receive a hope. Lazarus was free enough in one way, for he came out of the tomb, but the blinding napkin was about his head; and even so it is with many a quickened sinner, for when you try to show him some cheering truth he cannot see it.

Moreover, here was *a repulsive object, but yet attractive.* Mary and Martha must have been charmed to see their brother, even though wrapped in grave-clothes. He startled all the assembly, and yet they were drawn to him. A man fresh from the sepulchre robed in a winding-sheet is a sight one would go a long way not to see, but such was Lazarus; yet a man restored from death it were worth while to travel round the world to look upon, and such was Lazarus. Mary and Martha felt their hearts dancing within them since their dear brother was alive. Notwithstanding the repulsiveness of the spectacle, it must have charmed them beyond anything they had seen except the Lord himself. So have we come near to a poor sinner; it was enough to frighten anybody to hear his groans, and to see his weeping, but yet he was so dear to every true heart that we loved to be with him. I have sometimes spoken with broken-hearted sinners, and they have pretty nearly broken my heart; and yet, when they have gone out of the room, I have wished to see a thousand like them. Poor creatures, they fill us with sorrow, and yet flood us with joy.

Moreover, here was a man *strong, and yet helpless.* He was strong enough to come forth from his grave, and yet he could not take the napkin from his own head, for his hands were bound, and he could not go to his house, for his feet were swathed. Unless some kind hand unbound him he would remain a living mummy. He had strength sufficient to quit the grave, but he could not be quit of his grave-clothes. So have we seen men strong, for the Spirit of God has been in them, and has moved them mightily; they have been passionately in earnest even

to agony in one direction, yet the newborn life has been so feeble in other ways that they seemed to be mere babes in swaddling clothes. They have not been able to enjoy the liberty of Christ, nor enter into communion with Christ, nor work for Christ. They have been bound hand and foot: work and progress have alike been beyond them. This seems a strange sequel to a miracle. The bands of death loosed, but not the bands of linen; motion given, but not movement of hand or foot; strength bestowed, but not the power to undress himself. Such anomalies are common in the world of grace.

III. This brings us to consider A TIMELY ASSISTANCE which you and I are called upon to render. O for wisdom to learn our duty, and grace to do it at once.

Let us consider *what are these bands which often bind newly regenerated sinners?* Some of them are blindfolded by the napkin about their head;—they are very *ignorant*, sadly devoid of spiritual perception, and withal the eye of faith is darkened. Yet the eye is there, and Christ has opened it; and it is the business of the servant of God to remove the napkin which bandages it, by teaching the truth, explaining it, and clearing up difficulties. This is a simple thing to do, but exceedingly necessary. Now that they have life we shall teach them to purpose. Besides that, they are bound hand and foot, so that they are compelled to *inaction;* we can show them how to work for Jesus. Sometimes these bands are those of *sorrow*, they are in an awful terror about the past; we have to unbind them by showing that the past is blotted out. They are wrapped about by many a yard of *doubt*, mistrust, anguish, and remorse. "Loose them, and let them go."

Another hindrance is the band of *fear*. "Oh," says the poor soul, "I am such a sinner that God must punish me for my sin." Tell him the grand doctrine of substitution. Unwrap this cerement by the assurance that Jesus took our sin, and that "by his stripes we are healed." It is wonderful what liberty comes by that precious truth when it is well understood. The penitent soul fears that Jesus will refuse its prayer; assure it that he will in nowise cast out any that come to him. Let fear be taken from the soul by the promises of Scripture, by our testimony to their truth, and by the Spirit bearing witness to the doctrine which we endeavour to impart.

Souls are very often bound with the grave-clothes of *prejudice*. They used to think so and so before conversion, and they are very apt to carry their dead thoughts into their new life. Go and tell them that things are not what they seem: that old things have passed away, and behold all things have become new. The days of their ignorance God winked at, but now they must change their minds about everything, and no more judge according to the sight of the eyes and the hearing of the ears. Some of them are bound with the grave-clothes of evil *habit*. It is a noble work to aid a drunkard to unwind the accursed bands which prevent his making the slightest progress towards better things. Let us tear off every band from ourselves that we may the more readily help *them* to be free. The bonds of evil habits may still remain upon men that have received the divine life until those habits are pointed out to them and the evil of them is shown and so they are helped by precept, prayer, and example to free themselves. Who among us would wish Lazarus to con-

tinue wearing his shroud? Who would wish to see a regenerate man falling into ill habits? When the Lord quickens men the main point of the business is secured, and then you and I can come in to loose every bond which would hamper and hinder the free action of the divine life.

But why are these bandages left? Why did not the miracle which raised Lazarus also loosen his grave-clothes? I answer because *our Lord Jesus is always economical of miracles.* False wonders are plentiful: true miracles are few and far between. In the Church of Rome such miracles as they claim are usually a lavish waste of power. When St. Swithin made it rain for forty days that his corpse might not be carried into the church it was much ado about very little; when St. Denis walked a thousand miles with his head in his hands one is apt to ask why he could not have journeyed quite as well if he had set it on his neck; and when another saint crossed the sea on a table-cloth it would appear to have been an improvement if he had borrowed a boat. Rome can afford to be free with her counterfeit coin. The Lord Jesus never works a miracle unless there is an object to be gained which could not be obtained in any other way. When the enemy said, "Command that these stones be made bread," our Lord refused, for it was not a fit occasion for a miracle. Lazarus cannot be raised out of the grave except by a miracle, but he can be unstripped without a miracle, and therefore human hands must do it. If there is anything in the kingdom of God which we can do ourselves it is folly to say, "May the Lord do it," for he will do nothing of the sort. If you can do it you shall do it; or if you refuse the neglect shall be visited upon you.

I suppose that those bands were left *that those who came to unwind him should be sure that he was the same man who died.* Some of them may have said, "This is Lazarus, for these are the grave-clothes which we wrapped about him. There is no trickery here. This is the self-same man that was laid out and prepared by us for burial." "I recollect putting in that stitch," cries one. "I remember that stain in the linen," cries another. From coming so near to Lazarus they would be equally well assured that he was really alive! They perceived his living flesh rising as each ligature was removed: they marked his breathing, and the flush which reddened his cheek. For some such cause our Lord permits the quickened sinner to remain in a measure of bondage, that we may know that the man is the same person who was really dead in trespasses and sins. He was no sham sinner, for the traces of his sins are still upon him. You can see by what he says that his training was none of the best; the relics of the old nature show what manner of man he used to be. Every now and then the smell of the sepulchre meets your nostril; the mould of the grave has stained his grave-clothes; his was true death, and no imitation of it. So, too, we know that he is alive, for we hear his sighs and cries, and we perceive that his experience is that of a living child of God. Those desires, that searching of heart, and that longing to be soundly right with God,—we know what these mean. It is a great help to us in discerning spirits, and in being assured of the work of God upon any person, to come into living contact with those imperfections which it is to be our privelege to remove under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Moreover, I still think that the main object was *that these disciples*

might enter into rare fellowship with Christ. They could each say, not proudly but still joyfully, "Our Lord raised Lazarus, and I was there and helped to unloose him from his grave-clothes." Perhaps Martha could say in after-life, "I took the napkin from my brother's dear face." and Mary could add, "I helped to unbind a hand." It is most sweet to hope that we have done anything to cheer, or to teach, or sanctify a soul. Not unto us can be any praise, but unto us there is much comfort concerning this thing. Brothers and sisters, will you not earn a share in this dear delight? Will you not seek the lost sheep? Will you not sweep the house for the lost money? Will you not at the very least help to feast the long-lost son? This, you see, *gives you such an interest in a saved person.* Those who are very observant tell us that those whom we serve may forget us, but those who do us a service are fast bound to us thereby. Many kindnesses you may do for people and they will be altogether ungrateful, but those who have bestowed the benefit do not forget. When the Lord Jesus sets us to help others it is partly that they may love us for what we have done, but still more that we may love them because we have rendered them a benefit. Is there any love like the love of a mother to her child? Is it not the strongest affection on earth? Why does a mother love her child? Did the little child ever render a pennyworth of service to the mother? Certainly not. It is the mother that does everything for the child. So then the Lord binds us to the new converts in love by permitting us to help them. Thus is the church made all of a piece and woven together from the top throughout by the workmanship of love. O you who are devoid of love it is evident that you do not labour with pure desire to benefit others, for if you did you would be filled with affection for them.

Ere we leave this point of seasonable assistance, let us ask—*why should we remove these grave-clothes?* It is enough reply that the Lord has bidden us do so. He commands us to "Loose him, and let him go." He bids us comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak. If he commands it we need no other reason. I hope, my dear friends, you will set to work at once, for the King's business requireth haste, and we are traitors if we delay.

We should do this because it is very possible that we helped to bind those grave-clothes upon our friend. Some of the people who were at Bethany that day had assisted in the burial of Lazarus, and surely those should loose Lazarus who helped to bind him. Many a Christian man before his conversion has helped to make sinners worse by his example, and possibly after his conversion he may by his indifference and want of zeal have aided in binding new converts in the bonds of doubt and sorrow. At any rate, you have said of many a person, "He will never be saved!" Thus you have wrapped him in grave-clothes; the Lord never told you to do *that*—you did it of your own accord; and now that he bids you remove those graveclothes, will you not be quick to do it?

I remember when somebody lent a hand to take the grave-clothes off from me, and therefore I desire to loose the grave-clothes of others. If we cannot repay what we owe to the precise individual who wrought us good, we can at least repay it by working for the general benefit of seekers. "There," said a benevolent man, as he gave help to a poor

man, "take that money, and when you can pay it back give it to the next man whom you meet who is in the same plight as yourself, and tell him he is to pay it to another destitute person as soon as he can afford it; and so my money will go travelling on for many a day." That is how our Lord does: he sends a brother to loose my bonds; then I am helped to set another free, and he releases a third, and so on to the world's end. God grant that you and I may not be negligent in this heavenly service.

IV. Lastly, A PRACTICAL HINT. If the Lord Jesus Christ employed the disciples in relieving Lazarus of his grave-clothes, do you not think he would employ us if we were ready for such work? Yonder is Paul: the Lord Jesus has struck him down; but the lowly Ananias must visit him and baptize him, that he may receive his sight. There is Cornelius: he has been seeking the Lord, and the Lord is gracious to him, but he must first hear Peter. There is a wealthy Ethiopian riding in his chariot, and he is reading the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, but he cannot understand it till Philip comes. Lydia has an opened heart, but only Paul can lead her to the Lord Jesus. Innumerable are the instances of souls blessed by human instrumentality; but I shall conclude by calling attention to one passage upon which I wish to dwell for a second or two.

When the prodigal came home, the father did not say to one of his servants, "Go and meet him,"—No; we read "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." He did all this himself. The father personally forgave him, and restored him; but we read further on "the father *said to his servants*, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry." The loving father might have done all this himself might he not? Oh yes, but then he desired that all the servants in the house should be of one accord with him in the joyful reception of his son. The great Lord could do everything for a sinner himself, but he does not do so because he wishes all of us to be in fellowship with him. Come, fellow-servants, bring forth the best robe. I am never happier then when I preach the righteousness of Christ, and try to put it upon the sinner. "What!" cries one, "you cannot put it on!" So the parable says—"Bring forth the best robe *and put it on him*." I not only bring it out and show it; but by the Holy Spirit's help I try to put it on the sinner. I hold it up before him, just as you hold up a friend's great-coat to help him to put it on. You have to guide the poor sinner's hand into the sleeve, and lift it up upon his shoulders or he might never get it on. You are to teach him, comfort him, cheer him, and, in fact, help him to be dressed like one of the family. Then the ring, can we not bring it forth? Surely the father should have put the ring upon his son's hand. No, he bids his servants do that. He cries to them, "Put a ring on his hand"; introduce him into fellowship, gladden him with the communion of saints. You and I must conduct the new convert into the joys of Christian society, and let him know what it is to be married unto Christ, and joined unto his people. We must put honour upon these reclaimed ones, and decorate those who once were degraded. Nor must we fail to put shoes on his feet! He

has a long journey to go; he is to be a pilgrim, and we must help to shoe him with the preparation of the gospel of peace. His feet are new in the Lord's ways: we must show him how to run on the Master's errands. As for the fatted calf, it is ours to feed the restored ones; and as for the music and the dancing, it is ours to make the hearts of penitents glad by rejoicing over them. There is plenty to be done: O my brethren, try and do some of it this morning. Certain among us will be looking after an enquirer as soon as the service is over, and they will try to put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. I wish that more of you did this; but if you cannot do so within these Tabernacle walls, do it when you get home. Commence a holy ministry for the converted who are not yet brought into liberty. There are children of God who have not yet a shoe to their feet; there are plenty of shoes in the house, but no servant has put them on. When I come to look, I see some brethren who have not the ring on their hand. Oh, that I might have the privilege of putting it on! I charge you, brethren, by the blood that bought you, and by the love that holds you, and by the supreme bounty which supplies your need, go forth and do what your Master graciously permits and commands you to do; loose Lazarus, bring forth the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and let us all eat and be merry with our Father. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xi. 1—46.

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ESTHER'S EXALTATION; OR, WHO KNOWETH?

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 27TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"—Esther iv. 13, 14.

THE appeal of Mordecai in his pressing time of distress was to one single person, namely, to Esther. I believe that I shall do better this morning by making my sermon an address to individuals than by speaking of nations or churches. I assuredly believe that England has been raised up as a nation and brought to her present unique position that she may be the means of spreading the gospel throughout all the nations of the earth. I judge that God has blessed the two great nations of the Anglo-Saxon race—England and the United States—and given them pre-eminence in commerce and in liberty on purpose that in such a time as this they may spread abroad the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Woe to these nations if they fail to fulfil their solemn obligations! If, being raised up for a purpose, they refuse to perform it, they shall melt away. If, being armed and carrying bows, they turn back in the day of battle, both empires will perish as surely as did the power of Macedon and the dominion of Rome. We ought to be very careful as a people to act upon the rule of righteousness and the principles of peace; for any other conduct is inconsistent with our high calling. We are entrusted with great opportunities; if we do not rightly use them the New Zealander of Macaulay may yet survey the ruins of this empire-city. "Thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed," said Mordecai to Esther, and he says the same to us. Oh, that England may know the day of her visitation.

We might properly say of any Christian church that it has its own appointed place in the purposes of divine mercy. If the candle is lighted, even though it be set upon a golden candlestick, it is not lighted for itself, but that it may give light to all that are in the house. If any church fail to bless others, and so proves unfaithful to her solemn trust, the Lord will take away the candlestick out of its place, and leave

the unfaithful to mourn in darkness. Remember the Lord's warning voice, "Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." Remember, also, unfaithful Jerusalem, whose house is left unto her desolate because she obeyed not the voice of the Lord. The church in Rome was once a church of high commanding influence for good: you know what it has become. Some other churches are on the way, I fear, to the same dreadful end. God grant that none of the churches with which we are connected as Christian people may ever either apostatize from the faith, or grow lax and worldly, or become indifferent to the glory of God and the salvation of men. I might thus speak to each church and say, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

My brethren, it is a wonderfully easy thing to denounce the faults of a government or of a nation, to complain of this being done, and of that being left undone; and this amusement may only serve to divert our conscience from its more profitable duties at home. But consider the matter, and remember that in a free state we each one are part and parcel of the nation, and of the government; and we are each one perpersonally responsible in our measure and degree for all the acts of the nation. It is an easy matter to tie up our country to the halberds like a criminal and then to flagellate it without mercy; it would be a far more profitable business to use the whip of criticism upon ourselves.

The same is true with regard to a church. Men are too apt to condemn in the mass what they tolerate in themselves as individuals. But why are we so ready to accuse the churches? Why are we so censorious as to what the churches do, and what the churches are? Who make up the churches? Why, we each one by our influence help to make the churches good, or bad, or indifferent, as the case may be. Therefore, I will not waste time in generalities, but I will come to personalities. I will follow Mordecai's tack, and speak alone to Esther; that is to say, to each one who may happen to be here to whom God has entrusted opportunity, talent, and position, I would urge them to remember that there is a something for each believer to do, a work which he cannot delegate to another, a task which it is his privilege to be permitted to undertake, which it will be to his solemn disgrace and detriment if he do not execute, but which will be to his eternal glory under God if he be found faithful in it. The gospel assures us that the great householder has committed talents "to every man according to his several ability." Our hope of success this morning in our sermon shall lie in your individualizing yourselves and hearing the voice of the Spirit of God, saying to each one, "Who knoweth whether *thou* art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

I shall lay out my sermon in four parcels, arranging it under four words.

I. The first word is HEARKEN! Hearken to my word, as Mordecai desired Esther to hearken to him. Hearken while God the Lord speaks to your heart, and calls you to your high vocation.

Hearken, first, to a question. Brother, *will you separate your interests from those of your people and your God?* I do not think that Mordecai was afraid that Esther would do so; but still it is sometimes

as well to prevent an evil before we perceive it; and he did so by saying, "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house." It was possible that being a queen it might enter into her mind that she would be safe even if all the rest of the Jews were put to death.

It would be a painful thing that her countrymen should be destroyed, but still the stroke might not touch her in the seclusion of the palace, where she had "not yet showed her kindred nor her people." She would still remain the favoured wife of the great king; and she might, therefore, selfishly look to herself, and leave those who were in peril to look to themselves or to their God, while she coldly hoped that the Lord would somehow or other give them deliverance. Does that temptation come across the path of any one of us? It may. You may say, "I shall be saved though the city should perish in its iniquity. Though the people are steeped in poverty and ignorance, I shall enjoy plenty and live in light. I know the Lord myself, and that is my main concern; if the heathen perish I am not one of them, and I am thankful that it will not interfere with my destiny." Will you argue in this selfish manner? Will you follow the wicked policy of separating your own personal interests from those of your Redeemer and his church? If so your ship is wrecked before it leaves the harbour. You are no child of God if this principle holds the mastery over you. Your salvation lies not in your separation from Christ and his church, but in your union with them. Over the sea of life there is no passing in safety but in the vessel which carries your Lord and his disciples. Are you going to sail in a separate boat, or will you try to swim across the sea in your own strength? Then look to yourself, and expect disaster. If your interests and Christ's are to be separated you must supply yourself with atonement, with righteousness, with spiritual life, and with heavenly food; yea, you must make a heaven for yourself. You cannot do this, and therefore it would be your ruin to attempt to stand alone. Do you wish to be joined with Jesus so as to be rescued from hell? I tell you, sirs, there is no receiving Christ unless you receive his doctrine and rule. You must receive this grace also, namely, that you give yourself to him to make his interests your interests, his life your life, his kingdom your kingdom, his glory your glory. Your personal welfare will be found in submergence into Christ. Sink or swim with your Lord and his cause. Do you mean to separate yourself from the church of God, and say, "I shall look to my own salvation, but I cannot be supposed to take an interest in saving others"? In such a spirit as that I do not say you *will* be lost, but I say you *are* lost already. It is as needful that you be saved from selfishness as from any other vice. Some of our worst fetters are those which are forged by selfishness, and this is one of the chief bonds which our Redeemer must burst for us. We must live unto God and love others as God hath loved us, or else we are still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. I conceive that nobody who professes to be a Christian would deliberately wish to set up a private estate apart from Christ and his cause. Then if you are partners in name, be partners in fact. If you have fellowship with Christ—remember that it is of the essence of fellowship that you are in co-partnership with him; if he is a loser, you are a loser, and you are to fret about it; and if he

is a gainer, you are a gainer, and you are to joy therein. He bids you rejoice with him that he has found his sheep that was lost I ask again,—Are you determined to set up a separate interest from Christ? If you are, say so deliberately and count the cost. Mark that man; for though he may in his selfishness spread himself abroad and flourish like a green bay tree, yet the day shall come when he shall wither, and the place that knows him shall know him no more for ever. O professed servant of God, minister, deacon, or private church-member, thou shalt perish if once thou beginnest to live unto thyself. Remember that word, ye careless women, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth;" and hearken, ye selfish religionists, to this truth: "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die."

Hearken to a second question. *If you could separate your interests from those of the cause of God, would you thereby secure them?* You are a church-member: you think also that you are a living member of the body of Christ, and you are tempted to look to yourself and to leave others to their shifts. Hearken,—"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." Is it so, that because you are yourself a member of a flourishing church, and because you enjoy all sorts of Christian privileges, you therefore harden your heart concerning dying churches and desponding saints? Do you imagine that the body can be sick, and yet you as a member of it will not suffer? I tell you, if the church of God goes aside it will be to your injury; if the truth of God be not preached you will be a loser; if Christian life be not vigorous you will be weakened. When a baneful atmosphere is over other Christians you will breathe it. Sinners cannot be left in their spiritual death without creating a foulness in the air which is to the peril of us all. If this great city is left to seethe and rot in its infidelity and misery and filthiness, fancy not that you Christian people will escape. You dwell with these outcasts, and you are already feeling their influence, and will feel it still more if they do not feel yours. How far and how deep that participation will go I will not venture to prophesy, for I am no prophet, neither the son of a prophet; but there are elements now fermenting which threaten, first, the existence of the commonwealth, and next, the liberties of Christian worship. Take you good heed, my brethren; things cannot long remain as they are. This great flood of wretchedness must be assuaged, or it will sweep us all away. I know not what of evil may yet come of the negligence of the Christian church towards the population with which it is surrounded. Those wretched beings who starve in over-crowded rooms will not die unavenged if nothing more comes of it than the sin which is begotten of want. If you live in a house well-ventilated, and well-drained, and you have near your hovels foul, filthy, dilapidated, over-crowded, when the fever breeds there it will not respect your garden wall; it will come up into your windows, smite down your children, or lay you yourself in the grave. As such mischief to health cannot be confined to the locality in which it was born, so is it with spiritual and moral disease; it must and will spread on all sides. This may be a selfish argument; but as we are battling with selfishness, we may fitly take Goliath's sword with which to cut off his head. You Christian people suffer if the church suffers; you suffer even if the world suffers.

If you are not creating a holy warmth, the chill of sin is freezing you. Unconsciously the death which is all around will creep over you who are idle in the church, and it will soon paralyse all your energies unless in the name of God you arouse yourselves to give battle to it. You must unite with the Lord and his people in winning the victory over sin, or sin will win the victory over you. Hearken to this, and let it sink into your mind.

Next, remember, for your humiliation, that *God can do without you.* Enlargement and deliverance will arise to his people from another place if it come not by us. If the Lord were tied up to any one man, or any one church, or any one nation, it were treasonable for that person, church, or nation to be negligent; but as the Lord waiteth not for man, neither tarrieth for the sons of men, it becomes them to mind what they are at. He can do without *us.* When he looked and there was no man, his own arm brought salvation; and as it was of old so will it be again. Mark you that. The great owner of the vineyard will have fruit at the end of the year, and if yonder tree does not bear it, he will cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground? If the husbandmen consult their own gain, and plot to gain the inheritance for themselves, their lord will destroy them, "and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." He will effect his purpose; he will fetch home his banished; he will gather together his scattered sheep; he will cause the earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea; and if we do not gather in the wanderers, or spread the knowledge of his grace, the work will be done by more faithful men. The Spirit saith unto the church in Philadelphia, "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The crown of this church has been soul-winning: suffer none to rob you of it. If any one of you has gained already the high honour of bringing sinners to Christ, do not lose it by a future life of sloth or powerlessness. Hold fast your zeal and perseverance, that you may be rewarded at the last day.

He can do without you; recollect that, O servant of the Lord! We are apt to think ourselves wonderfully important, and begin to fret if we are put aside from our work for a little; but perhaps this affliction is necessary to teach us and to teach all that know us to cease from man and to look to God alone. It would be a sad thing to exhibit pride and self-conceit, and provoke the Lord to show the world how readily he can dispense with our labours. With this truth in view my heart cries—

> "Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,
> But train me for thy will."

Here follows a still more sobering reflection. Recollect that as God can do without us, *it may be he will do without us.* It might come to pass that God would say, "I will no more bless the world by this England; she has become selfishly mercantile; she cares more for commerce than for righteousness; she is drunken and infidel; I will give her up. Her merchants care nothing for the poor, whose labour is ill-requited; let her pass away as all oppressors must, and let the nations say—"Alas, alas, that great city, that mighty city! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought." He may say to any church,

"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth." "Ichabod" has been written aforetime, and may be again, on places where once there shone upon the forefront the inscription—"Holiness unto the Lord." So also any man may be set aside, even as the Lord put away Saul, and said to him, "Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." Though, like Samson, a hero may have slain his thousands, and the hopes of Israel hang upon the hero; yet shorn and blinded, he may yet grind with slaves at the mill if his lusts enslave him. The Lord may decline to use us if we are not prepared in such a time as this to do our very utmost, and to lay ourselves out for the cause of truth and holiness. It may please the Lord to say of a wicked and slothful servant, "Take away his talent from him and give it to him that hath ten talents." He may say to any pastor among us, "Let his habitation be desolate, and his bishoprick let another take." Hearken, I pray you, to this warning from the Lord. Hear, O heaven, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord will judge his people, and to whom much is given of him shall much be required.

Hearken to yet one thing more. *How will you bear the disgrace, if ever it come upon you, of having suffered your golden opportunities to be wasted?* What if Israel had been destroyed for lack of Esther's intercession? Her name would have been a byword among other nations as a base and traitorous woman. If the people had been spared by some other means, and she had refused her mission, as long as there lived a Jew they would have kept no feast of Purim, but have cursed her memory. When I think of the neglects of our own ancestors I am anxious that we take warning by them. There are at this moment straths in the Highlands which are thoroughly Romish. Why? They were not carefully evangelized at the time of the Reformation. If the workers of that period had done their work thoroughly there would have been no Romish valleys in Presbyterian Scotland. Ireland still cowers under the shadow of the Pope; there was a hopeful time when better things were promised, but this was allowed to pass by; and what can be done to rescue Ireland now? Times do not tarry, and tides do not wait; and if we do not avail ourselves of them while they are with us, our descendants may lament our neglects. I fear that the best among us can recollect with regret times which we have suffered to pass over us unimproved. We can never call them back again. You did not train your children: they are men and women now, and will not listen to you. Oh, parents, why did you not speak to them when they would have listened? But what if a whole life should glide away in living for yourselves, in living for your own comfort and enriching? What if you have done nothing in all these years for the cause of the Lord Jesus and the coming of his kingdom? What disgrace awaits the unfaithful servant! What dishonour awaits *you!* If you have been clouds without rain, wells without water, smoking lamps giving no light, fields that yield no harvest, what must be your portion? Let every Esther resolve that she will never bring this ban upon her name: let every man, woman, and even child among us, knowing the Lord, feel that the vows of the Lord are upon us, and that by imperative necessity we must serve according to our capacity the cause of God and truth.

If we even perish through our zeal for the Lord of hosts it will be grand thus to lose our lives. Thus much for the word "Hearken." May the Spirit of God sanctify your hearts by his word.

II. I change a little, and the call is now "CONSIDER."

Consider to what some of you have been advanced. You have been raised to salvation. You have been lifted from the dunghill and set among princes. I have uttered the word "salvation;" but what an infinity of goodness lies hidden there! In the music of that word all sweetnesses meet together. What are the obligations of one elected according to the foreknowledge of God, redeemed by the heart's blood of Christ, and quickened by the Holy Ghost? What manner of persons ought we to be? You have been raised to that honour, walk worthy of it. Besides that, some of you have been raised to a considerable degree of Christian knowledge,—you are not now mere babes in grace; you are well instructed, and you have had a blessed experience both of trouble and of joy, which has made you strong in the Lord, and has confirmed you in the faith, and has admitted you into the inner circle where the joy of the Lord is best known. If I had said that you had been elevated to be queens, like Esther, it would have been a poor elevation compared with that which you have actually received. Some of you who are the favourites of heaven have leaned your head on Christ's bosom, and have been permitted to sit where angels would wish to be; you are near and dear to Jesus, and espoused to him in love.

In addition to all this, the Lord has raised some of you out of poverty and brought you to comparative wealth, perhaps to positive wealth; and he has given you positions which once you never dreamed of. To this he adds domestic comfort, and health, and prosperity in all its forms. The Lord has also given you talent. I fear we have all of us more ability than we use—but some have more talent than they themselves are aware of, and this perhaps they display in business, but never in the cause of God.

Thus you are brought to the kingdom; but why is it so? I want you to consider *why the Lord has brought you where you are.* Do you think that he has done it for your own sake? Does he intend all this merely that you may practise self-indulgence? Can this be the design of God? Do not think so. Has he done all this merely to give you pleasure? Not so: God's work is like a net of many meshes, and these are all connected with each other. We are links of the same chain, and cannot move without moving others. We are members of one body, and God acts towards us with that fact in view. He does not bless the hand for the hand's sake, but for the sake of the whole body. Well then, dear friend, you are saved that you may save; you are taught that you may teach; you are confirmed in the faith that you may confirm others; talents are allotted to you that you may turn them over and bring in heavenly usury for your Lord. Whatever you have is yours not to hoard for yourself, or to spend upon yourself, but that you may use it as a good steward of God. Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom which God has given thee for such a time as this, when there is need of thee and all that thou hast?

Consider, next, *at what a time it is that you have been thus advanced.* You have been instructed in the faith in a time when unbelief is rampant.

What for? You have been confirmed in full assurance at a time when many are weak and trembling. What for? You have been entrusted with talent in a time when multitudes are perishing for lack of knowledge. What for? You are found in the church when valued brethren are dying or moving off. Why is this? You have wealth when many are starving. Why is this? You hold a high position when many master spirits are leading men into infidelity, or ritualism, or communism. Why are you placed where you are? Brother, your inevitable answer must be that God has put you where you are for some good purpose, which purpose must be connected with his own glory, and with the extension of his kingdom in the world. If, however, you think it enough to have secured a fortune, let me ask you—Do you think you are the proprietor of what you have amassed; or do you admit that you are a steward? If you are a steward, use not the goods entrusted to you for your own ends, but for your Master; for if you do not, you are a thief. Whenever a steward considers that the estate is his own property, and not his master's, he is a thief, and before long his master will deal with him and say, "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward."

Consider also, I pray you, *under what very special circumstances you have come where you are.* To you as an individual I distinctly speak, and to no one else. It was a very strange thing that Esther, who was the foster child of Mordecai, a humble Jew, should rise from lowly rank to be the queen of Persia. Out of all the women gathered from every province how singular that she should be chosen to be queen! Special Providence selected the Jewish maiden for the throne. The like is true of each one of us now occupying a post of usefulness. David was taken from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young, that he might be the shepherd of God's people Israel. I am marvelling to find myself where I now am; are not you? How came you into your present pastorate, my dear brother in the ministry? How did you gain that comfortable position which you now occupy in society? How came you even to be in the church of God? Oh, if anybody had told yonder brother a few years ago that he would be here, he would have sworn at them; but here he is, sitting at the feet of Jesus, charmed to be his disciple. Now, consider what a wonder of grace you are, what a singular favour it is that you are where you are. Should not these remarkable dealings of the Lord towards you bind you to the divine service? Many a man of business here to-day obtaining a satisfactory livelihood has a dozen times been within an inch of bankruptcy, and yet he has obtained help, and passed the rock in safety. Some of you have been well-nigh ruined several times; and yet you still have bread to eat and raiment to put on. It is a miracle in your eyes that you have not come to beggary. Let your special deliverances and memorable mercies be as the tongue of persuasion, constraining you to grateful service. Consider how great things the Lord has done for you, and let us not have to say, "Many times did he deliver them, but they soon forgat his works. They understood not his wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of his mercies."

Then I beg you to consider once more, *with what singular personal adaptations you are endowed for the work to which God has called you.* I believe you are endowed with special capacity for a certain work, so that

no one is so fitted for it as yourself: you are a key to a lock which no other key will fit so well. God has prepared you for the work for which you are appointed. Is it not written—"Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work"? Each labourer for the Lord has his proper tools found him. God does not, like Pharaoh, require us to make bricks without straw, nor to fight without weapons, nor to build without a trowel. The Lord provides lamps, and oil, and wedding-garments for all who are called to the Bridegroom's midnight banquet. You, my brother, are equipped for such work as the Lord has appointed you; will you not at once get to your post? You say, "If I could preach, I would do it gladly." You would not preach worthily unless you are even now prepared to do other service for which you are fitted. You would be a disgrace to the pulpit if you are useless in the home circle. If God entrusts you with a single talent, and you do not use it, neither would you use ten talents; for he that is unfaithful in that which is least, would be unfaithful in that which is greatest. "But," says one, "I can hardly get out to public worship; I am a mother shut in at home with five or six little children." To you there is a little kingdom in your own household. No one can bring up those little ones for the Lord so well as you can. Your influence over them is as strong as it is tender. Now, do not say, "Because I am not allowed to be a preaching woman, therefore I will not attend to the lowly care of my children." It is far better to train a little family for Jesus than to be attempting a work to which you are not called. Let each one of you feel that he has come to his own little kingdom for such a time as this. You and your work fit each other: God has joined you together, let no man put you asunder. Ask for more power from the Holy Spirit, and if there happens to be a tool which the Lord intends for you which hangs a little higher than your present reach, get the ladder of earnest endeavour and you will soon attain to it. Consider how you can improve yourself; give yourself to reading; study Scripture more, and use all helps towards increased knowledge and efficiency. If a further qualification be within your reach, be eager for it, and even the reaching after it may be as great a blessing to you as the talent itself.

III. Thirdly, ASPIRE. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Rise to the utmost possible height. Fulfil your calling to its loftiest degree. Not only do all that you are sure you can do, but aim at something which as yet is high up among the questions. Say to yourself, "Who knoweth?" That is what the ambitious man says when he aspires to be great. When Louis Napoleon was shut up in the fortress of Ham, and everybody ridiculed his foolish attempts upon France, yet he said to himself, "Who knows? I am the nephew of my uncle, and may yet sit upon the imperial throne," and he did so before many years had passed. I have no desire to make any man ambitious after the poor thrones, and honours, and riches of this world; but I would fain make you all ardently ambitious to honour God and bless men. Who knows? Does anybody know what God may do by you? Does anybody know what capacities slumber within your bosom? I suggest the enquiry, and I will help you to an answer.

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" *Nobody knows to the contrary.* I cannot tell but what God may bless you to this entire nation. Nobody will dare to say that he cannot. I cannot tell but what God may bless you, my friend, to that part of London in which you live, even though you may be deeply conscious of its great needs, and of your own insufficiency. Who can tell what the Lord can or will do? Dear mother, who knows but what the Lord Jesus may bless you to all the members of your family, so that by your means all the little ones shall come to him? Nobody has any right to speak to the contrary. Who knows but what God may bless you, dear teacher, to all your Sunday-school class, so that you may meet them all in heaven? Nobody can declare that it shall not be so, therefore strive after it. The watchword is, "Aspire."

Further, *nobody knows the limit of the possibilities which surround any man—should God please to use him.* "Alas," cries one, "I am soon at the end of my powers." My dear brother, if you begin calculating how much there is in you by nature, and how much you can do of yourself, you may as well end the enquiry by hearing our Lord's word—"Without me ye can do nothing." Though you be no better than a mere cipher, yet the Lord can make something of you. Set one before a cipher and it is ten directly. Let two or three noughts combine to serve the Lord, and if the Lord Jesus heads them these nothings become tens of thousands. Who knows what you can do? Shall the church ever say, "Here is a problem we cannot solve?" Bite your lip through rather than have it thought that you doubt the power of the Almighty. All things are possible to him that believeth. Ye are able to take the land into possession, the Lord being your helper. Go up against even these entrenched Canaanites, the walls of whose cities reach to heaven, for you can drive them out. You seem in your own sight to be as grasshoppers when compared with the sons of Anak; but the Lord on high is mighty, and out of the weakest things he hath ordained strength to his honour and glory. Young man, I trust you have given your heart to the Lord; what are you going to do? You have come into some property unexpectedly; or you are promoted in a house of business—what is the meaning of it? "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" My talented brother should you not take your share in battling with present evils? I believe that in dark times God is making lamps with which to remove the gloom. Martin Luther is sitting by his father's hearth in the forest when the Pope is selling his wicked indulgences: he will come out soon, and stop the crowing of the cock of the Romish Christ-denying Peter. John Calvin is quietly studying when false doctrine is most rife, and he will be heard of at Geneva. A young man is here this morning—I do not know whereabouts he is, but I pray the Lord to make this to be an ordination sermon to him, starting him on his life-work. I feel as if I were Samuel at Bethlehem, seeking for David, to anoint him with a horn of oil in the name of the Lord. Some beloved brethren are here who have done a good deal, and the Lord has blessed them; but their work is heavy and their hearts are weary. By the anointing which has given you the kingdom, I trust that you will not be weary in well-doing. Pluck up courage, for a grand future is

before you. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Be content to be a living sacrifice. Say with Esther, "If I perish, I perish. I am content to give myself up for such a cause. Come life, come death, I am all his own; if I die in my Lord's work, I die content."

Further, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" *You do not yourself know.* I speak experimentally, using my own self as an instance in the work which God has enabled me to do. If it had been revealed to me that I should have enjoyed the opportunities which have fallen to my lot, I could never have believed it. If the Lord could use *me,* he can also use *you.* Only stand in a waiting posture, saying, "Here am I, send me!" and you shall see things which you dare not expect. If the curtain could be withdrawn, and you could behold the future, you would exclaim, "Is thy servant born of angels that he should attempt such things as these?" I do not suppose Peter, James, and John had any inkling of what the Lord was going to do by them when they left their boats and nets at his call. John dreamed that one day he might sit on an earthly throne and his brother James on another, but this was not to be: yet have they obtained a nobler heritage. To each of us there is a share in the purposes of heaven, and this is a kingdom large enough. Who knoweth, brother or sister, whether thou art put in thy family to save thy family? Who knoweth whether thou art made to live in a back street to bless that street? Who knoweth whether thou art set down in a forlorn district to upraise that district? Who knoweth whether thou art put into that nation to save that nation? Ay, put into the world in Christ's name to save the world? Aspire to great things for God.

IV. Our fourth word is—CONFIDE. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" If thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this, *be confident that thou art safe.* If God has brought Esther to the throne that she may go in unto the king and save her people; go in, good Esther! Fear not the risk. Fast and pray your three days before you go; but be not dismayed. If the womanhood in you trembles in the prospect of a possible death, let confidence in God override your fears. Ahasuerus cannot kill you; you cannot die: he can refuse his golden sceptre to all the princes of the empire, but not to you; for God has placed you where you are, and ordained you for his purpose. Rest assured if he had meant to destroy you he would not have shown you such things as these. Fall back on his past mercy and be confident.

What is more, if God has a purpose to serve by a man that man will live out his day and *accomplish the divine design.* The more resistance he experiences the more surely will his life-work be achieved. If all the devils in hell rose up at once against a true, devoted servant of God, who has a work to do, in the name of the Lord he would drive them away as smoke before the wind. David said, "They compass me about like bees, yea, they compass me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them." It is a bad day for anybody when he opposes himself to the manifest destiny of one of the Lord's commissioned ones. I fall back often on the grand truth of predestination: it is no sleepy doctrine to

me. If God's decree so runneth there is no altering it, and if he has purposed it there is no defeating it. Heaven and earth shall sooner fail than the eternal purpose. Each chosen servant of God is like the word which called him: as the word of the Lord does not return unto him void, but prospers in the thing whereto he hath sent it, even so shall it be with every servant of the Most High. A holy confidence in the divine purpose instead of making men grow stolid and idle may prove to be one of the mightiest impulses to the heroic life. Cromwell's Ironsides to a man believed in the everlasting purpose, therefore they were invincible, for no fear ever breathed upon them. Though the hosts of the tyrant may be innumerable, yet with the war cry, "The Lord of hosts is with us," we will ride forth conquering and to conquer. Settle it in your mind that the Lord has called you to the work, and then advance without question or fear. Put your hand to the plough, and pause not. Do the work with your might. Do not stand asking how: do it as you can. Do not stand asking when: do it directly. Do not say, "But I am weak":—the Lord is strong. Do not say, "But I must devise methods." Do not concoct schemes or tarry to perfect your methods: fling yourself upon the work with all your might. Load your cannon with rough bits of rock or stones from the road if nothing better comes to hand; ram them in with plenty of powder; and apply the fire. When you have nothing else to hurl at the foe, place yourself in the gun. Believe me, no shot will be more effectual than the hurling of your whole being into the conflict. There was a man who strove in the House of Commons for what he thought would be a great boon to seamen, but he could not prevail. At last he broke through all the rules of the house and acted like a fanatic, and when everybody saw that the man was so in earnest that he was ready to faint and die, they said, "We must do something"; and it was done. An enthusiasm which overpowers yourself is likely to overpower others. Do not fail from want of fervour. Never mind if men think you crazy. When you are overwhelmed yourself the flood of zeal will bear all opposition before it. When you become so fanatically insane as to be absorbed by a passion for the glory of God, the salvation of men, the spread of truth, and the reclaiming of the fallen masses, there shall be about you the truest sanity, and the mightiest force. May you feel such a passion concerning missions to-day. May you feel that the gospel must be preached to all nations. May you feel that impulse at this moment while we worship God by giving our contributions to his cause.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Esther iv.; Psalm cxvi. 12—19.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—972, 663, 116 (Part II.)

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A HEAVENLY PATTERN FOR OUR EARTHLY LIFE.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON WEDNESDAY MORNING, APRIL 30TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER-HALL.

Being the Annual Sermon of the Baptist Missionary Society.

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matthew vi. 10.

OUR Father's will shall certainly be done, for the Lord "doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." Let us adoringly consent that it shall be so, desiring no alteration therein. That "will" may cost us dear; yet let it never cross our wills: let our minds be wholly subjugated to the mind of God. That "will" may bring us bereavement, sickness, and loss; but let us learn to say, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." We should not only yield to the divine will, but acquiesce in it so as to rejoice in the tribulation which it ordains. This is a high attainment, but we set ourselves to reach it. He that taught us this prayer used it himself in the most unrestricted sense. When the bloody sweat stood on his face, and all the fear and trembling of a man in anguish were upon him, he did not dispute the decree of the Father, but bowed his head and cried, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." When we are called to suffer bereavements personally, or when, as a holy brotherhood, we see our best men taken away, let us know that it is well, and say most sincerely, "The will of the Lord be done."

God knows what will best minister to his gracious designs. To us it seems a sad waste of human life that man after man should go to a malarious region, and perish in the attempt to save the heathen: but infinite wisdom may view the matter very differently. We ask why the Lord does not work a miracle, and cover the heads of his messengers from the death-shaft? No reason is revealed to us, but there is a reason, for the will of the great Father is the sum of wisdom. Reasons are not made known to us, else were there no scope for our faith; and the Lord loves that this noble grace should have ample room and verge enough. Our God wastes no consecrated life: he has made nothing in vain: he ordains all things according to the counsel of his will, and that counsel never errs. Could the Lord endow us with his own omniscience, we should not only consent to the deaths of his servants, but should

deprecate their longer life. The same would also be true of our own living or dying. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"; and therefore we are sure that he does not afflict us by bereavement without a necessity of love. We must still see one missionary after another cut down in his prime; for there are arguments with God, as convincing with him as they are obscure to us, which require that by heroic sacrifice the foundations of the African church should be laid. Lord, we do not ask thee to explain thy reasons to us. Thou canst screen us from a great temptation by hiding thyself; for if even now we sin by asking reasons, we might soon go further, and provoke thee sorely by contending against thy reasons. He who demands a reason of God is not in a fit state to receive one. In the case of the honoured men whom the Lord has removed from us this year, there is assuredly no loss to the great cause as it is viewed by the eye of God. See the great stones and costly stones laboriously brought from the quarry to the edge of the sea! Can it be possible that these are deliberately thrown into the deep? It swallows them up! Wherefore is so much labour thrown away? These living stones might surely have been built into a temple for the Lord; why should the waves of death engulf them? Yet more are sought for, and still more: will the hungry abyss never cease to devour? Alas, that so much precious material should be lost! It is not lost. No, not a stone of it. Thus the Lord layeth the foundation of his harbour of refuge among the people. "Mercy shall be built up for ever." In due time massive walls shall rise out of the deep, and we shall no longer ask the reason for the losses of early days.

Peace be to the memories of the heroic dead! Men die that the cause may live. "Father, thy will be done." With this prayer upon our lips let us bend low in child-like submission to the will of the great Jehovah, and then gird up our loins anew to dauntless perseverance in our holy service. Though more should be taken away next year, and the next, yet we must pray on, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

My heart is grieved for the death of the beloved Hartley, and those noble men who preceded him to "the white man's grave." I had seen *him* especially, for it had been a joy to assist him for three years in preparing for missionary service. Alas! the preparation led to small visible results. He left us, he landed, and he died. Surely the Lord means to make further use of him; if he did not make him a preacher to the natives, he must intend that he should preach to us. I may say of each fallen missionary, "He being dead yet speaketh." "Faithful unto death," they inspire us by their example. Dying without regret in the cause of such a Master, they remind us of our own indebtedness to him. Their spirits rising to his throne are links between this Society and the glorified assembly above. Let not our thoughts go downward to their graves, but rise upward to their thrones. Does not our text point with a finger of flame from earth to heaven? Do not the dear departed ones mark a line of light between the two worlds?

If the prayer of our text had not been dictated by the Lord Jesus himself, we might think it too bold. Can it ever be that this earth, a mere drop of a bucket, should touch the great sea of life and light above and not be lost in it? Can it remain earth and yet be made like to heaven? Will it not lose its individuality in the process? This earth is subject

to vanity, dimmed with ignorance, defiled with sin, furrowed with sorrow; can holiness dwell in it as in heaven? Our Divine Instructor would not teach us to pray for impossibilities; he puts such petitions into our mouths as can be heard and answered. Yet certainly this is a great prayer; it has the hue of the infinite about it. Can earth be tuned to the harmonies of heaven? Has not this poor planet drifted too far away to be reduced to order and made to keep rank with heaven? Is it not swathed in mist too dense to be removed? Can its grave-clothes be loosed? Can thy will, O God, be done in earth as it is in heaven? It can be, and it must be; for a prayer wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit is ever the shadow of a coming blessing, and he that taught us to pray after this manner did not mock us with vain words. It is a brave prayer, which only a heaven-born faith can utter; yet it is not the offspring of presumption, for presumption never longs for the will of the Lord to be perfectly performed.

I. May the Holy Spirit be with us, while I first lead you to observe that THE COMPARISON IS NOT FAR-FETCHED. That our present obedience to God should be like to that of holy ones above is not a strained and fanatical notion. It is not far-fetched, *for earth and heaven were called into being by the same Creator.* The empire of the Maker comprehends the upper and the lower regions. "The heaven, even the heavens are the Lord's"; and "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." He sustaineth all things by the word of his power both in heaven above and in the earth beneath. Jesus reigneth both among angels and men, for he is Lord of all. If, then, heaven and earth were created by the same God, and are sustained by the same power, and governed from the same throne, we believe that the same end will be subserved by each of them, and that both heaven and earth shall tell out the glory of God. They are two bells of the same chime, and this is the music that peals forth from them: "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah!" If earth were of the devil and heaven were of God, and two self-existent powers were contending for the mastery, we might question whether earth would ever be as pure as heaven; but as our ears have twice heard the divine declaration, "Power belongeth unto God," we expect to see that power triumphant, and the dragon cast out from earth as well as heaven. Why should not every part of the great Creator's handiwork become equally radiant with his glory? He that made can remake. The curse which fell upon the ground was not eternal; thorns and thistles pass away. God will bless the earth for Christ's sake even as once he cursed it for man's sake.

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." *It was so once.* Perfect obedience to the heavenly will upon this earth will only be a return to the good old times which ended at the gate of Eden. There was a day when no gulf was digged between earth and heaven; there was scarce a boundary line, for the God of heaven walked in Paradise with Adam. All things on earth were then pure, and true, and happy. It was the garden of the Lord. Alas, that the trail of the serpent has now defiled everything. Then earth's morning song was heard in heaven, and heaven's hallelujahs floated down to earth at eventide. Those who desire to set up the kingdom of God are not instituting a new order of things; they are restoring, not inventing. Earth will drop into the old

groove again. The Lord is King: and he has never left the throne. As it was in the beginning so shall it be yet again. History shall, in the divinest sense, repeat itself. The temple of the Lord shall be among men, and the Lord God shall dwell among them. "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven."

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." *It will be so at the last.* I shall not venture far into prophecy. Some brethren are quite at home where I should lose myself. I have scarcely yet been able to get out of the gospels and the epistles; and that deep book of Revelation, with its waters to swim in, I must leave to better instructed minds. "Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of that book;" to that blessing I would aspire, but I cannot yet make claim to interpret it. This much, however, seems plain,—there is to be "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." This creation, which now "groaneth and travaileth in pain," in sympathy with man, is to be brought forth from its bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Blessed be the Lord Christ, when he brought his people out of their bondage, he did not redeem their spirits only, but their bodies also: hence their material part is the Lord's as well as their spiritual nature, and hence again this very earth which we inhabit shall be uplifted in connection with us. The creation itself shall be delivered. Materialism, out of which there has been once made a vesture for the Godhead in the person of Christ, shall become a fit temple for the Lord of hosts. The New Jerusalem shall come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride is prepared for her husband. We are sure of this. Therefore unto this consummation let us strive mightily, praying evermore, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Meanwhile, remember also that *there is an analogy between earth and heaven,* so that the one is the type of the other. You could not describe heaven except by borrowing the things of earth to symbolize it; and this shows that there is a real likeness between them. What is heaven? It is Paradise, or a garden. Walk amid your fragrant flowers and think of heaven's bed of spices. Heaven is a kingdom: thrones, and crowns, and palms are the earthly emblems of the heavenlies. Heaven is a city; and there, again, you fetch your metaphor from the dwelling-places of men. It is a place of "many mansions"—the homes of the glorified. Houses are of earth, yet is God our dwelling-place. Heaven is a wedding-feast; and even such is this present dispensation. The tables are spread here as well as there; and it is our privilege to go forth and bring in the hedge-birds and the highwaymen, that the banqueting-hall may be filled. While the saints above eat bread in the marriage supper of the Lamb, we do the like below in another sense.

Between earth and heaven there is but a thin partition. The home country is much nearer than we think. I question if "the land that is very far off" be a true name for heaven. Was it not an extended kingdom on earth which was intended by the prophet rather than the celestial home? Heaven is by no means the far country, for it is the Father's house. Are we not taught to say, "Our Father which art in heaven"? Where the Father is the true spirit of adoption counts itself near. Our Lord would have us mingle heaven with earth by naming it twice in this short prayer. See how he makes us familiar

with heaven by mentioning it next to our usual food, making the next petition to be, "Give us this day our daily bread." This does not look as if it should be thought of as a remote region. Heaven, is at any rate, so near that in a moment we can speak with him that is King of the place, and he will answer to our call. Yea, before the clock shall tick again you and I may be there. Can that be a far-off country which we can reach so soon? Oh, brothers, we are within hearing of the shining ones; we are well-nigh home. A little while and we shall see our Lord. Perhaps another day's march will bring us within the city gate. And what if another fifty years of life on earth should remain, what is it but the twinkling of an eye?

Clear enough is it that the comparison between the obedience of earth and that of heaven is not far-fetched. If heaven and heaven's God be, in truth, so near to us, our Lord has set before us a homely model taken from our heavenly dwelling-place. The petition only means—let all the children of the one Father be alike in doing his will.

II. Secondly, THIS COMPARISON IS EMINENTLY INSTRUCTIVE. Does it not teach us that *what* we do for God is not everything, but *how* we do it is also to be considered? The Lord Jesus Christ would not only have us do the Father's will, but do it after a certain model. And what an elevated model it is! Yet is it none too elevated, for we would not wish to render to our heavenly Father service of an inferior kind. If none of us dare say that we are perfect, we are yet resolved that we will never rest until we are. If none of us dare hope that even our holy things are without a flaw, yet none of us will be satisfied while a spot remains upon them. We would give to our God the utmost conceivable glory. Let the mark be as high as possible. If we do not as yet reach it, we will aim higher and yet higher. We do not desire that our pattern should be lowered, but that our imitation should be raised.

"Thy will *be done* in earth, as it is in heaven." Mark the words "*be done*," for they touch a vital point of the text. God's will is *done* in heaven. How very practical! On earth his will is often forgotten, and his rule ignored. In the church of the present age there is a desire to be doing something for God, but few enquire what he wills them to do. Many things are done for the evangelizing of the people which were never commanded by the great Head of the Church, and cannot be approved of by him. Can we expect that he will accept or bless that which he has never commanded? Will-worship is as sin in his sight. We are to do his will in the first place, and then to expect a blessing upon the doing of that will. My brethren, I am afraid that Christ's will on earth is very much more discussed than done. I have heard of brethren spending days in disputing upon a precept which their dispute was breaking. In heaven they have no disputes, but they do the will of God without discord. We are best employed when we are actually doing something for this fallen world, and for the glory of our Lord. "Thy will be done": we must come to actual works of faith and labours of love. Too often we are satisfied with having approved of that will, or with having spoken of it in words of commendation. But we must not stay in thought, resolve, or word; the prayer is practical and business-like, "Thy will be *done* in earth, as it is in heaven." An idle man stretched himself on his bed when the

sun had risen high in heaven, and as he rolled over, he muttered to himself that he wished this were hard work, for he could do any quantity of it with pleasure. Many might wish that to think and to speak were to *do* the will of God; for then they would have effected it very thoroughly. Up yonder there is no playing with sacred things: they do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Would God his will were not alone preached and sung below, but actually *done* as it is in heaven.

In heaven the will of God is done *in spirit*, for they are spirits there. It is done *in truth* with undivided heart, and unquestioned desire. On earth, too often, it is done and yet not done; for a dull formality mocks real obedience. Here obedience often shades off into dreary routine. We sing with the lips, but our hearts are silent. We pray as if the mere utterance of words were prayer. We sometimes preach living truth with dead lips. It must no longer be so. Would God we had the fire and fervour of those burning ones who behold the face of God. We pray in that sense, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." I hope there is a revival of spiritual life among us, and that, to a large extent, our brotherhood is instinct with fervour; but there is room for far more of zeal. Ye that know how to pray, go down upon your knees, and with the warm breath of prayer arouse the spark of spiritual life until it becomes a flame. With all the powers of our innermost being, with the whole life of God within us, let us be stirred up to do the will of the Lord on earth as it is done in heaven.

In heaven they do God's will *constantly, without failure.* Would God it could be so here! We are aroused to-day, but we fall asleep to-morrow. We are diligent for one hour, but sluggish the next. This must not be, dear friends. We must be steadfast, unmovable—always abounding in the work of the Lord. We need to pray for sacred perseverance, that we may imitate the days of heaven upon the earth by doing the Lord's will without a break.

They do God's will in heaven *universally, without making a selection.* Here men pick and choose—take this commandment to be obeyed, and lay that commandment by as non-essential. We are, I fear, all tinctured, more or less, with with this odious gall. A certain part of obedience is hard, and therefore we try to forget it. It must no longer be so; but whatsoever Jesus saith unto us we must do. Partial obedience is actual disobedience. The loyal subject respects the whole law. If anything be the will of the Lord, we have no choice in the matter, the choice is made by our Lord. Let us pray that we may neither misunderstand the Lord's will, nor forget it, nor violate it. Perhaps we are, as a company of believers, ignorantly omitting a part of the Lord's will, and this may have been hindering our work these many years; possibly there is something written by the pen of inspiration which we have not read, or something read that we have not practised; and this may hold back the arm of the Lord from working. We should often make diligent search, and go through our churches to see wherein we differ from the divine pattern. Some goodly Babylonish garment or wedge of gold may be as an accursed thing in the camp, bringing disaster to the Lord's armies. Let us not neglect anything which our God commands lest he withhold his blessing.

His will is done in heaven *instantly, and without hesitation.* We, I

fear, are given to delays. We plead that we must look the thing round about. "Second thoughts are best," we say, whereas the first thoughts of eager love are the prime production of our being. I would that we were obedient at all hazard, for therein lies the truest safety. Oh, to do what God bids us, as God bids us, on the spot, and at the moment! It is not ours to debate, but to perform. Let us dedicate ourselves as perfectly as Esther consecrated herself when she espoused the cause of her people, and said, "If I perish, I perish." We must not consult with flesh and blood, or make a reserve for our own selfishness, but at once most vigorously follow the divine command.

Let us pray the Lord that we may do his will on earth as it is done in heaven; that is, *joyfully, without the slightest weariness.* When our hearts are right, it is a glad thing to serve God, though it be only to unloose the latchets of our Master's shoes. To be employed by Jesus in service which will bring us no repute, but much reproach, should be our delight. If we were altogether as we should be, sorrow for Christ's sake would be joy: ay, we should have joy right along, in dark nights as well as in bright days. Even as they are glad in heaven, with a felicity born of the presence of the Lord, so should we be glad, and find our strength in the joy of the Lord.

In heaven the will of the Lord is done *right humbly.* There perfect purity is set in a frame of lowliness. Too often we fall into self-gratulation, and it defiles our best deeds. We whisper to ourselves, "I did that very well." We flatter ourselves that there was no self in our conduct, but while we are laying that flattering unction to our souls, we are lying, as our self-contentment proves. God might have allowed us to do ten times as much, had he not known that it would not be safe. He cannot set us upon the pinnacle, because our heads are weak, and we grow dizzy with pride. We must not be permitted to be rulers over many things, for we should become tyrants if we had the opportunity. Brother, pray the Lord to keep thee low at his feet, for in no other place canst thou be largely used of him.

The comparison being thus instructive, I pray that we may be the better for our meditation upon it. I do not find it an easy thing even to describe the model; but if we essay to copy it: "this is the work; this is the difficulty." Unless we are girded with the divine strength we shall never do the will of God as it is done in heaven. Here is a greater labour than those of Hercules, bringing with it victories nobler than those of Alexander. To this the unaided wisdom of Solomon could not attain; the Holy Ghost must transform us, and lead the earthly in us captive to the heavenly.

III. Thirdly, I beg you to notice, dear friends, that THIS COMPARISON of holy service on earth to that which is in heaven, IS BASED UPON FACTS. The facts will both comfort and stimulate us. Two places are mentioned in the text which seem very dissimilar, and yet the likeness exceeds the unlikeness—earth and heaven.

Why should not saints do the will of the Lord on earth as their brethren do it in heaven? What is heaven but the Father's house, wherein there are many mansions? Do we not abide in that house even now? The Psalmist said, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee." Have we not often said of our Bethels, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of

heaven"? The spirit of adoption causes us to be at home with God even while we sojourn here below. Let us therefore do the will of God at once.

We have the same fare on earth as the saints in heaven, for "the Lamb in the midst of the throne doth feed them:" he is the Shepherd of his flock below, and daily feeds us upon himself. His flesh is meat indeed, his blood is drink indeed. Whence come the refreshing draughts of the immortals? The Lamb doth lead them to living fountains of waters; and doth he not even here below say to us, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink"? The same river of the water of life which makes glad the city of our God above, also waters the garden of the Lord below.

Brethren, we are in the same company below as they enjoy above. Up there they are with Christ, and here he is with us, for he hath said—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." There is a difference as to the brightness of his presence; but not as to the reality of it. Thus you see we are partakers of the same privileges as the shining ones within the city gates. The church below is a chamber of the one great house, and the partition which separates it from the church above is a mere veil, of inconceivable thinness. Wherefore should we not do the Lord's will on earth as it is done in heaven?

"But heaven is a place of peace," says one; "there they rest from their labours." Beloved, our estate here is not without its peace and rest. "Alas," cries one, "I find it far otherwise." I know it. But whence come wars and fightings but of our fretfulness and unbelief? "We which have believed do enter into rest." That is not in all respects a fair allegory which represents us as crossing the Jordan of death to enter into Canaan. No, my brethren, believers are in Canaan now; how else could we say that the Canaanite is still in the land? We have entered upon the promised heritage, and we are warring for the full possession of it. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. I for one do not feel like a lone dove flying over waters dark, seeking rest for the sole of her foot. No, I have found my Noah: Jesus has given me rest. There is a difference between the best estate of earth and the glory of heaven, but the rest which every soul may have that learns to conquer its will, is most deep and real. Brethren, having rest already, and being participators of the joy of the Lord, why should we not serve God on earth as they do in heaven?

"But we have not their victory," cries one, "for they are more than conquerors." Yes, and "our warfare is accomplished." We have prophetic testimony to that fact. Moreover, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." In the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord giveth us the victory, and maketh us to triumph in every place. We are warring; but we are of good cheer, for Jesus has overcome the world, and we also overcome by his blood. Ever is this our war-cry, "Victory! Victory!" The Lord will tread Satan under our feet shortly. Why should we not do the Lord's will on earth as it is done in heaven?

Heaven is the place of fellowship with God, and this is a blessed feature in its joy; but in this we are now participators, for "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." The fellowship of the Holy Ghost is with us all; it is our joy and our delight.

Having communion with the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are uplifted and sanctified, and it is becoming that by us the will of the Lord should be done on earth as it is in heaven.

"Up there," says a brother, "they are all accepted, but here we are in a state of probation." Did you read that in the Bible? for I never did. A believer is in no state of probation; he has passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation. We are already "accepted in the Beloved," and that acceptance is so given as never to be reversed. The Redeemer brought us up out of the horrible pit of probation, and he has set our feet on the rock of salvation, and there he has established our goings. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." Wherefore should we not, as the accepted of the Lord, do his will on earth as it is done in heaven?

"Ay," saith one, "but heaven is the place of perfect service; for 'his servants shall serve him.'" But is not this the place, in some respects, of a more extensive service still? Are there not many things which perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do? If we had choice of a sphere in which we could serve God with widest range, we should choose not heaven but earth. There are no slums and over-crowded rooms in heaven to which we can go with help, but there are plenty of them here. There are no jungles and regions of malaria where missionaries may prove their unreserved consecration by preaching the gospel at the expense of their lives. In some respects this world has a preference beyond the heavenly state as to the extent of doing the will of God. Oh, that we were better men, and then the saints above might almost envy us! If we did but live as we should live, we might make Gabriel stoop from his throne and cry, "I wish I were a man!" It is ours to lead the van in daily conflict with sin and Satan, and at the same time ours to bring up the rear, battling with the pursuing foe. God help us, since we are honoured with so rare a sphere, to do his will on earth as it is done in heaven.

"Ay," say you, "but heaven is the place of overflowing joy." Yes, and have you no joy even now? A saint who lives near to God is so truly blessed that he will not be much astonished when he enters heaven. He will be surprised to behold its glories more clearly; but he will have the same reason for delight as he possesses to-day. We live below the same life which we shall live above, for we are quickened by the same Spirit, are looking to the same Lord, and rejoicing in the same security. Joy! Do you not know it? Your Lord says, "That my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." You will be larger vessels in heaven, but you will not be fuller; you will be brighter, doubtless, but you will not be cleaner than you are when the Lord has washed you and made you white in his own blood. Do not be impatient to go to heaven. Nay, do not have a wish about it. Set very loose by the things of earth; yet count it a great privilege to have a long life in which to serve the Lord on earth. Our mortal life is but a brief interval between the two eternities, and if we judged unselfishly, and saw the needs of earth, we might almost say, "Give us back the antediluvian periods of human life, that through a chiliad we might serve the Lord in suffering and in reproach, as we cannot do in glory." This life is the vestibule

of glory. Array yourselves in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, for this is the court-dress of earth and heaven. Manifest at once the spirit of saints, or else you will never abide with them. Now begin the song which your lips shall carol in Paradise, or else you will never be admitted to the heavenly choirs; none can unite in the music but those who have rehearsed it here below.

IV. Lastly, THIS COMPARISON, which I feel I can so feebly bring out, of doing the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven, OUGHT TO BE BORNE OUT BY HOLY DEEDS. Here is the urgency of the missionary enterprise. God's will can never be intelligently done where it is not known; therefore, in the first place, *it becomes us as followers of Jesus to see to it that the will of the Lord is made known* by heralds of peace sent forth from among us. Why has it not been already published in every land? We cannot blame the great Father, nor impute the fault to the Lord Jesus. The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, nor the mercy of God restrained. Is it not probably true that the selfishness of Christians is the main reason for the slow progress of Christianity? If Christianity is never to spread in the world at a more speedy rate than the present, it will not even keep pace with the growth of the population. If we are going to give to Christ's kingdom no larger a percentage than we have usually given, I suppose it will require about an eternity-and-a-half to convert the world; or, in other words, it will never be done. The progress made is so slow, that it threatens to be like that of the crab, which is always described in the fable as going backward. What do we give, brethren? What do we do? A friend exhorts me to say that the Baptist Missionary Society ought to raise a million a-year. I have my doubts about *that;* but he proposes that we should, at least, try to do so for one year. There is nothing like having a high mark to aim at. A million a-year seems hugely too much by the general consent of you all, and yet I am not sure. What amount of property is now held by Baptists? The probable estimate of money now in the hands of baptized believers in the United Kingdom might make us ashamed that a million is not put down at once. Far more than that is spent by a similar number of Englishmen upon strong drink. We do not know how much wealth lies in the custody of God's stewards; and some of them are not likely to let us know until we read it in the paper, and then we shall discover that they died worth so many hundreds of thousands. The world counts men to be worth what they hoard; but in truth they were not worth much, or else they could not have retained so much from the work of the Lord when it was needed for the spread of the gospel. As a denomination we are improving a little. We are improving *a little.* I was obliged to repeat that sentence, and place the emphasis in the right place. We may not congratulate ourselves: considerable room for improvement yet remains: the income of the Society might be doubled and no one oppressed in the process. It is not for us to say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven: but, Lord, thou hast many ways and means of accomplishing that will; I pray thee do it, but let me not be asked to help on the work." No, when I utter this prayer, if I am sincere I shall be searching my stores to see what I can give to make known the truth. I shall be enquiring whether I cannot personally speak the saving word.

I shall not decline to give because the times are very hard, neither shall I fail to speak because I am of a retiring disposition. An opportunity is a golden gift. Now, do not offer the prayer of the text if you do not mean it. Better omit the petition than play the hypocrite with it. You who fail to support missions when it is in your power to do so should never say, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," but leave out that petition for fear of mocking God.

Our text, dear friends, leads me to say that as God's will must be known that it may be done, *it must be God's will that we should make it known;* because God is love, and the law under which he has placed us is that we love. What love of God dwelleth in that man who denies to a benighted heathen that light without which he will be lost? Love is a grand word to talk of, but it is nobler as a principle to be obeyed. Can there be love of God in that man's heart who will not help to send the gospel to those who are without it? We want to bless the world; we have a thousand schemes by which to bless it, but if ever God's will is done in earth as it is done in heaven it will be an unmixed and comprehensive blessing. Join the Peace Society by all means, and be forgiving and peaceable yourself; but there is no way of establishing peace on the earth except by God's will being done in it, and that can only be done through the renewing of men's hearts by the gospel of Jesus Christ. By all manner of means let us endeavour so to control politics, as Christian men, that oppression shall not remain in the earth; but, after all, there will be oppression unless the gospel is spread. This is the one balm for all earth's wounds. They will bleed still until the Christ shall come to bind them up. Oh, let us then, since this is the best thing that can be, show our love to God and man by spreading his saving truth.

The text says, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Suppose any one of you had come from heaven. It is but a supposition; but let it stand for a minute: suppose that a man here has come fresh from heaven. Some would be curious to see what his bodily form would be like. They would expect to be dazzled by the radiance of his countenance. However, we will let that pass. We want to see how he would live. Coming newly from heaven, how would he act? Oh, sirs, if he came here to do the same as all men do on earth, only after a heavenly sort, what a father he would be, what a husband, what a brother, what a friend! I would sit down and let him preach this morning, most assuredly; and when he had done preaching, I would go home with him, and have a chat. I should be careful to observe what he would do with his substance. His first thought would be, if he had a shilling, to lay it out for God's glory. "But," says one, "I have to go to shop with my shilling." Be it so, but when you go say, "Oh! Lord, help me to lay it out to thy glory." There should be as much piety in buying your necessaries as in going to a place of worship. I do not think this man coming fresh from heaven would say, "I must have this luxury; I must have this goodly raiment; I must have this grand house." But he would say, "How much can I save for the God of heaven? How much can I invest in the country I came from?" I am sure he would be pinching and screwing to save money to serve God with; and he himself, as he went about the streets, and mingled with ungodly men and women, would be sure to find out ways of getting at their con-

sciences and hearts; he would be always trying to bring others to the felicity he had enjoyed. Think that over, and live *so*—so as he did who really did come down from heaven. For after all, the best rule of life is, what would Jesus do if he were here to-day, and the world still lying in the wicked one? If Jesus were in your business, if he had your money, how would he spend it? For that is how *you* ought to spend it. Now think, my brother, you will be in heaven very soon. Since last year a great number have gone home: before next year many more will have ascended to glory. Sitting up in those celestial seats, how shall we wish that we had lived below? It will not give any man in heaven even a moment's joy to think that he gratified himself while here. It will give him no reflections suitable to the place to remember how much he amassed, how much he left behind to be quarrelled over after he was gone; he will say to himself, "I wish I had saved more of my capital by sending it on before me, for what I saved on earth was lost, but what I spent for God was really laid up where thieves do not break through and steal."

Oh, brothers, let us live as we shall wish we had lived when life is over; let us fashion a life which will bear the light eternal. Is it life to live otherwise? Is it not a sort of fainting fit, a coma, out of which life may not quite have gone, but all that is worth calling life has oozed away? Unless we are striving mightily to honour Jesus, and bring home his banished, we are dead while we live. Let us aim at a life which will outlast the fires which shall try every man's work.

If I may have moved any person here to resolve, "I will so live," I have not spoken in vain. I have at least stirred myself with the intense desire to cast off the mere outsides and husks of life, and to ripen the real kernel of my being. Thy will by me be done on earth, as yet, my Lord, I hope to do it in the skies. May I begin here a life worthy to be perpetuated in eternity. God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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A Sermon,

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 4TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth." Psalm cxix. 88.

WHEN David wrote this part of the psalm he was evidently beset by many enemies who sought to destroy him, and it is exceedingly important to note what part of himself he guarded with the most care. Which part of his nature did he regard as the most vital? Where did he hold the shield that he might be screened from the darts of the foe? We observe that his prayer is very little about his body, or his temporal interests. Like other men, he desired to be preserved in life and kept in prosperity; but his main prayer is not about these matters. Evidently his chief thought is concerning his soul, his character, his adherence to God's word, his steadfastness in the faith. Observe the current of his supplication,—"Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth." He is not so anxious to keep his health, or to keep his house, or to keep his crown, or even to keep his life, as he is that he may keep the testimony of God's mouth. O brethren, everything is right when the heart is right, and everything is wrong when the soul is wrong. We are prospering even when we lose our wealth if we grow in grace; but we are in the direst adversity, even if we are growing rich, if we become spiritually poor. Starve your soul, and you will be wretched amid the dainties of a king's table; but let your soul be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and a dinner of herbs will be better to you than a stalled ox. The first thing, the main thing, the chief thing, is that the heart be kept true towards God and his word. Concerning this David prays.

I would call to your notice this morning, first, *his intense desire,* which is that he may keep the testimony of God's mouth; secondly, *his consequent prayer* arising out of that desire. "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth." When we have spoken upon those two points we shall then endeavour to use the whole text by way of showing *his holy example,*—a lesson to all believing people in all ages to strive after quickened spiritual life that they may keep the testimony of God's mouth.

I. First, in these words of David, we have HIS INTENSE DESIRE that he might keep the testimony of God's mouth.

This desire was *founded in a high esteem of God's word.* He viewed the divine revelation as coming directly from Jehovah's own mouth. To some men this holy book is no more inspired than the plays of Shakespeare or the poems of Milton. We have in the Old Testament, they say, the sacred writings of the Jews, which deserve to be treated with great respect; and this is all. David thought not so; and, thank God, we join with David in his opinion. David speaks of God's word, though he had but a small portion of it compared with what we have, as "the testimony of God's mouth." To me there is no explanation of those words except that which involves verbal and infallible inspiration. The testimony of God's mouth must be given in words: God's heart has thoughts, but God's mouth has words; and words from the omniscient and true God must be infallible. This view invests Holy Scripture with an awe and a glory which create in us the deepest reverence, and constrain us to the most earnest attention. When we look upon every word of this precious book as coming fresh from God's mouth, we liken it to those other words by which he called the universe out of nothing, and created light where else had been darkness. To the ear that is rightly tuned by God's Spirit there is a voice and a music as of infinite wisdom and love about every syllable of Scripture. The breath of life is in the testimony from the mouth of the living God. In truth the Lord may have spoken the word actually by the mouth of Moses, but spiritually his own mouth has uttered it. The inspired sentence may come down to us from the pen of David; Isaiah, or any other of the prophets, may have been the visible medium of its transmission; but the word itself has come distinctly and directly, with absolute truth and unmingled purity, from the mouth of the Most High. The coin of inspiration comes from the mint of infallibility. The truth is the teaching of the God of truth. As such we render to it our ears, our hearts, and our obedient lives. What God hath said we dare not question. The man of God wraps his face in his mantle and bows before the divine majesty, humbly saying, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Those who have this reverence for God's word will long to cling to it; they will be afraid of misinterpreting it; and they will not venture to add any of their own words to it, lest they be called into judgment for such presumption. The ear of the devout man seems to hear the thunder of that sentence, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." God grant that we may accept the Bible not as the writings of man, but as the word of the living God. A few evenings ago we were led to think of those who tremble at God's word: may we be numbered among them, for to such will God look, and with such will he dwell. Let us unite with the Psalmist in saying, "Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them."

This prayer of David's, springing from his great reverence for the revealed will of God, *includes within it many points of virtue.* I cannot

explain what he means by keeping the testimony of God's mouth by any one line of things: it is a far-reaching prayer, as full as it is brief. He means, no doubt, that he desired to be *steadfast in the doctrine* which the mouth of the Lord had spoken. He wished to be taught of the Lord so as to know the truth, and then to be so confirmed and established in it that no wind of doctrine should carry him away from his moorings. He desired to be steadfast, unmovable, rooted and grounded in the truth of God. Such an attainment is much to be desired at this time. The things which we have learned and have received we must hold fast until our Lord shall come. He has set us in our place to keep guard over his truth; let no sentry sleep at his post. He has put us in trust with the gospel; God grant we may not be dishonest trustees, trifling with our charge. May those especially who are teachers of others be good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Though we bring forth things new and old, let us take care that we bring forth nothing but what we find in the treasury of the Word. Woe unto the prophet who declares "a vision of his own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord." Too many are doing so at this hour, glorying in their boasted culture, and trusting to their own intellects. Of such we may say with Jeremiah, "They are prophets of the deceit of their own heart." The Lord shall one day silence such, and put their followers to confusion. But blessed is that man who speaks the mind of God, and causes the people to hear the word of the Lord. Man's word is for the forum, but God's word must be spoken in his temple. The things which we have heard, and seen, and received of the Spirit of God, these things we would hold and teach, and nothing beside. I am sure that the prayer of our text means—Help me, Lord, to know, believe, and hold fast the testimony of thy mouth: may I be a true believer, having my feet upon the solid rock of thy teaching, and not upon the quicksand of man's invention. May I never be ashamed of thy truth. If men call it outworn and effete, may I nevertheless know it to be thine own eternal word which liveth and abideth for ever. Let me feel it to be quickening, reviving, strengthening, and as full of power and energy as ever it was. May I believe concerning it that it has the dew of its youth about it, that its locks are bushy and black as a raven, that it still goeth forth as the sun from the chambers of the morning, and that like a mighty man it marches onward conquering and to conquer. Brethren, this word shall never return unto God void, but it shall accomplish that which he pleases. This meaning of the prayer is worthy of solemn note in these evil days.

But there is another meaning which will seem to some more practical, though indeed it is not so; for there is as much real practice about right thinking as about right acting; and for the understanding to be obedient to God is as vital a thing as for the actions of the life to be conformed to his will. We ought to be anxious to be *obedient to God in all his precepts;* and if we are striving to be so, our prayer should daily be that we may be preserved in the keeping of the testimony of God's mouth. Our Father who is in heaven has told his children what his will is: should not this constrain them to fulfil it? He has been pleased to teach us what it is that pleaseth him; should we not hate that which God hates, and love that which he delights in? Let us pray that we may be set in

the straight and narrow way which leadeth unto life eternal, and may be kept there even to the end. There is no law of God's mouth which a faithful and loving believer would wish to be ignorant of: there is no command of his mouth which we would wilfully disobey or neglect. Our prayer is, "Make me to run in the way of thy commandments." That law of God, which was once so terrible to us, has lost its frowns through the atoning sacrifice: and now we delight in the law of God after the inward man, and we long to be perfectly conformed to it. Our grief is that we are not perfect; sin is our pain and plague. We shall never be perfectly happy till we are perfectly holy. Sin is a constant fret and burden to us: whenever we see even a trace of it in our nature or our acts, we cry, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" We cannot endure that the shade of evil should flit across the imagination; nay, even if in our dreams a sin doth cast its shadow over our spirit we wake disturbed. We would not have a wish which leans towards iniquity: we would have every thought brought into captivity to the Lord, bound by the bonds of righteousness and led prisoner along the triumphant way of sanctification; for holiness is life, light, and liberty to us. "I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts." Freedom from the power of evil is the highest liberty which we expect on earth. I am sure, my friends, the prayer is rising in your hearts at this moment—

> "Teach me to run in thy commands,
> 'Tis a delightful road,
> Nor let my head, nor heart, nor hands,
> Offend against my God."

David further desired that he might be preserved in perfect and unwavering *confidence in the promises of God.* The testimony of God's mouth is largely made up of exceeding great and precious promises. Oh, what rich and eternal things hath he promised to them that fear him! No good thing will he withhold from them: all things shall work together for their good. He will give them of the dew of heaven, and of the deep that lieth under; the chief things of the ancient mountains and the precious things of the lasting hills has he covenanted to give them. The sad fact is that sometimes his own people begin to question those promises, and if the vision tarrieth they are in unbelieving haste, and limit the Holy One of Israel. Yet the covenant is ordered in all things and sure: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Not one of his words shall fail: nor shall one blessing which he has promised be withheld. "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." His covenant shall stand fast, though heaven and earth pass away; he will not alter the thing that hath gone out of his mouth. Therefore our prayer is that we may keep the testimony of his mouth, and, like our fathers, may be persuaded of the promises, and may embrace them. What an instructive word is that! "Embraced them"—pressing them to their hearts, and holding them dear to their souls. Oh, never, never let us dare to suspect the faithfulness of our God; rather let us emulate the faith of Abraham, who staggered not at the promise through unbelief; believing that if God had promised him a seed of Isaac, and yet

commanded him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, God was able even from the dead to raise him up, and so to keep his word. All things may be contrary to what they seem to be, and all human witnesses may be intentionally or unintentionally false, but the Eternal God must be true. "Let God be true and every man"—ay, and every thing—"a liar." It were better to suppose the very heavens did lie, and that the earth beneath us had become untrue, and that all our senses were instruments of deception, rather than we should for a moment allow that the God of truth could falter or waver. The largest faith of which the most enlarged mind is capable is the righteous due of God, who cannot err or change. Be this your prayer, that you may be confident of the truth of every promise of the covenant of grace, and stand to it, come life or come death. Be this your firm resolve: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

This prayer then, you see, has a very wide significance, and I want you to observe that upon the very surface of the words there is an indication that this desire in his soul was *backed up by the experience of the past.* He desires to keep the testimony of God's mouth; and that implies that he has already received that testimony, and is in possession of it. If a man has not obtained a thing, he cannot keep it. Beloved, I would throw you back this morning for a moment upon memories of the past. Do you remember the place, the spot of ground where first you heard of God with your inner ear? Do you remember your beggary, your disease, your death? and how the heavenly word gave you wealth, healing, and life in Christ? Since then, how precious, how soul-sustaining, how full of deliverance, how pregnant with victory, have the words of God been to you in days of affliction and conflict! At this day you must feel that you could not leave this precious word, for you would be leaving the fountain of living waters. It has been your life, your joy, your all; why should you leave it? With David you can bear witness, "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction." Whither will you go if you forsake the Lord's testimony? What way is open to you if you turn from the way of his statutes? But, my brothers, the mercies of the past, I might even say the miseries of the past, all bind us to our God and to his statutes. All that has happened hitherto has only magnified his word above all his name. We have lived on that word when else our soul had died of famine: we have had light in the midst of more than Egyptian darkness through its testimonies. What wonders we have wrought through the promises of God. "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength." By the power of this word have we run through a troop, by our God have we leaped over a wall. Passing through the fire we have not been burned; wading through the rivers we have not been drowned; for the word of the Lord has brought us deliverance. Believe for the future, for the past demands it! God grant that we may, by a childlike confidence, for ever keep the testimony of his mouth.

Furthermore, this desire is *necessitated by the struggles of the present.* Poor David had become like a bottle in the smoke: his eyes were failing, his heart had fainted, his days were growing few, his pathway was intercepted with pits, he was persecuted wrongfully, he was almost consumed; but he adds, "I forsook not thy precepts." That

was the saving clause of it all. We may be in the smoke, but we shall not be smothered; we may be persecuted, but we shall never be forsaken; we may be cast down, but we shall not be destroyed while we keep the testimonies of God's mouth. We are still in the sea, therefore let us cling to our life-buoy; we are still in the wilderness, let us daily gather the heavenly manna. Cast not away your confidence, which even now hath great recompense of reward. Stand you to it, that, be the present what it may, your choice is made; your understanding is assured, your convictions are indelible. Change as ye will, all ye that know not God; but we that know him by long experience are inseparably united to him. To quit the truth of God for modern notions would be to leave the streams from Lebanon for the sand of the desert, the sweet waters of Siloah for the brine of the Dead Sea. Tossed no longer with tempest, our soul has found her anchorage and rests in the Lord. "O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise!" We are not for ever learning, but we have come to the knowledge of the truth by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. We are neither to be bribed nor bullied so as to lose our faith, for it is of the operation of God. The elect shall not be deceived, for they know the voice of their Lord, and he has taught them to distinguish the language of truth from the jargon of error.

I am sure I may add that this desire of David is *well warranted by every prospect of the future.* We do not know what troubles we shall yet experience; but we do know that he who hath helped us bears us through, and makes us more than conquerors too. The testimony of God's mouth is our shield in the day of battle. We cannot put on Saul's armour, for we have not proved it; but we have proved the panoply which God provides for us in his word, and therefore we wear it daily. That future, which extends in endless vista far beyond our mortal life, demands faithfulness of us. If we are traitors to the truth of God to-day, what will become of the next generation, and the next, and the next? At this hour we suffer for the negligences of our ancestors: error has been established by a long continuance of perversity—shall we persevere in maintaining falsehood? To-day will ye rebuild the Jericho which the Reformers threw down? Will we pull down the Jerusalem which they have built up? If so, our sons shall curse the memory of their sires. This poor world may experience great delay to her grand hope if Christian men in the present are unfaithful to the truth. Ages hang upon the conduct of the church of to-day. Speak out the truth while you live, so that when you leave this life it may be said, "He being dead yet speaketh." Let us to-day anchor the church to sound doctrine, lest she drift further and further in years to come. Speak God's word faithfully, for that word shall live and conquer when you are gone. He that soweth the seed of heresy and evil doctrine entails upon succeeding generations an evil and a plague, and his very name shall rot; but he that soweth the good seed shall be the father of ten thousand successive harvests. To-day we may seal the coming centuries unto the Lord, setting the impress of the truth upon them. Be ye steadfast for the truth in your own day, for you know not what perilous times will come, before the advent of the Lord Jesus. Your words and acts to-day will affect eternity itself. A word spoken to-day,

barbed with ill intent, and envenomed with the poison of falsehood, may make souls to smart throughout a dread eternity. Tremble therefore lest in any wise ye cease to keep the testimony of the mouth of God. Thus much upon David's desire: may a like desire burn in our hearts!

II. Secondly, let us consider HIS CONSEQUENT PRAYER. He did not pray immediately that he might keep the testimony of God's mouth, but he offered the next prayer to it, the one which leads up to it right surely. As a man that goeth up to his chamber doth not leap up all at once, but climbeth the stairs, so doth David rise to the keeping of the Lord's word by the prayer,—"Quicken me after thy lovingkindness."

This prayer is *wisdom*. He that saith, "I shall keep the testimony of God's mouth, for I am fully resolved to do it," had better salt that resolution with prayer, or it will rot like all things which come of the flesh. "Oh," saith he, "I am strong-minded and firmly established, and shall never be moved from the hope of my high calling." O man, thou knowest not thyself, nor the power of temptation, if thou art depending upon thyself. Thou wilt be as readily blown away as the thistledown upon the wold when the north wind is raging. O heart, thou art but human; and humanity is unstable as water. O man, thou art frail as a shadow; trust not in thyself for a moment. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." Put up a prayer to God that he would confirm thee, for in that way and in that only shalt thou be true to his statutes. He shall keep God's testimony that is kept by God's power, and he alone; therefore this prayer is wisdom. Moreover, as there is but one Lord and Giver of life, what more could David do than pray? He could not give himself life, and he was wise to apply to him who alone quickeneth the dead.

This prayer was *suggested*, I do not doubt, *by David's inward state*. He says, "Quicken me." Does he mean that he was dead? Yes, comparatively. He means that he felt the power of death working in him. Before he is quite numbed he cries, "Quicken me." He was not altogether dead, for dead men never pray for quickening; but he had a sense of deadness creeping over him, gradually chilling the genial current of his soul. He was dull; he was heavy; he felt lethargic, and indisposed to activity. "Quicken me, Lord," saith he; "Quicken me." The Lord hath given us some life, beloved, but that life at intervals seems to go to sleep through weariness: let us pray, "Quicken me, Lord." The Lord has given us his well-beloved Son, not only that we might have life, but that we might have it more abundantly. Is thy life vigorous, dear brother? Yet still this prayer is suitable to thee; still cry, "Quicken me." Nobody knows how much vitality a man can manifest. He who seems all alive might still have more life. He can rise from life to strength, from strength to activity, from activity to intensity, from intensity to violence. When a man is thoroughly alive what a man he is! Are we not, the most of us, a droning, sleepy, half-quickened set? We mope and grope like men who are looking for their graves; but when the Lord comes to us he quickens us from head to foot, and then the blood leaps in our veins, our spiritual breath is full and deep, and we are fired with enthusiasm. We are dry now and powerless, like the bush in the desert; but the Spirit descends upon us as fire, and then we

blaze with divine fervour. We can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth us. If we desire to cleave to the truth let us pray that up to the highest point we may be filled with the life of God, since life and truth go together. Oh that we may become quick in every respect, quickened by him who is the resurrection and the life. This is every way a suitable prayer; a very fitting one for lukewarm Laodiceans. It will not be out of place in the mouth of any one of us. However full of life we may be, let us all together plead for this master blessing of quickening.

"Revive thy work, O Lord,
Disturb this sleep of death,
Quicken the smouldering embers now,
By thine almighty breath."

It is a prayer which *met David's condition.* Carefully read the octave of verses with "Caph" at the head of them, and see how well it fits in at the end of each. "My soul fainteth"—"Quicken me." "Mine eyes fail"—"Quicken me." "I am become like a bottle in the smoke"—"Quicken me." "How many are the days of thy servant?"—I seem near to death—"Quicken me." "The proud have digged pits for me"—"Quicken me," that I may spy out their pitfalls and avoid them. "They persecute me wrongfully"—"Quicken me," Lord; for they cannot hurt me, though they pour death upon me, if thou pour life into me. "They had almost consumed me"—"Quicken me," and then I may burn with fire, but I shall not be consumed. You see, the blessing of quickening meets all these conditions. I believe that the best preservative under trial is increased spiritual life. Did I hear you complain, "I am very poor"? Brethren, if your soul is quickened and you become rich in faith, poverty will be a light burden. "But I am very depressed in spirit." Truly, this is sad; but if you are more fully quickened, you will shake it off as living men put from them the cerements of the tomb. But you cry, "I have such hard work to do!" If you have stronger life, the task will be easier. "But I have been disappointed and defeated." You will have few defeats, or you will bear them joyfully when your spiritual life is vigorous and full. "Quicken me." I suggest that this prayer be presented all over the place by every child of God. Breathe it before God in the silence of your hearts. "Quicken me: quicken me." I, thy minister, how much I need the quickening influences of thy Spirit! My brethren associated with me in the church, how much they require it! Lord, quicken us all! You that have come up from the country, some of you grow dull enough in your rustic quietude. Join with us in pleading, "Quicken me." You who are Sunday-school teachers want life for yourselves if you are to communicate it to others. In any and every case increased spiritual life will be a blessing to you. Whatever your difficulty, whatever your doubt, whatever your sorrow, whatever your temptation, here is a prayer that meets every case: "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness."

It is a prayer especially *which answered to David's aim in presenting it.* He prayed this prayer that he might be enabled to keep God's testimony. Now who are the people that give up sound doctrine? Why, the people who do not know the quickening power of it in their own

souls, and do not live in the delightful enjoyment of it. Who are the people that give up holy practice? Why the people that are not dwelling in the power of the Holy Ghost, and are not full of the life of God. Who are those that are tossed up and down like the locust and are shifty, and have no fixed position? Why they are the men that have not received the fulness of life from on high. You can do a great many things with a dead man; but you cannot make him stand upright: you may try most earnestly, but a corpse cannot stand; until you put life into the body it will fall to the ground; and so if the life of God be not in you you cannot hold the truth, or maintain purity, or walk in integrity. Life is absolutely essential to steadfastness in the truth. Whenever I hear of churches and ministers departing from the faith, I know that piety is at low ebb among them. It is proposed that we should argue with them: it is of no avail to argue with dead people. It is proposed that we should bring out another book of Christian evidences: it is small benefit to provide glasses for those who have no eyes. What is wanted is more spiritual life; for as the truth quickens men they love the quickening word; but dead men care little about that which is to them a dead letter. "Thy word hath quickened me," says David; and the man that is quickened clings to the truth which quickens him. Whenever you feel a little shaky, and your feet begin to totter, and your head to swim, just cry, "Lord, quicken me; here is a sign that I am dying, for I am doubting; pour more of thy power into me." When spiritual life is healthy, it will feed upon the word, and so take it into its innermost self that nothing can remove it. Why do men grow weary of heavenly food? David tells us—"Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death." Just so: the best meat in God's word is not enjoyed by men who are sinful and foolish, for they are suffering under a soul-sickness which kills holy appetite. The prayer of our text answers to David's aim: "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth."

He presented this prayer on the right ground. Observe how he pleads the mercy and love of God. "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness." That is a lovely way of putting it:—I do not now appeal to thy righteousness, but to thy love, thy special love, thy loving*kinnedness* to those that are of kin to thee. Lord, I would entreat thee to bless me because of thy lovingkindness to those whom thou didst foreknow and didst predestinate to be thine own. Oh, by that special love of thine I pray thee quicken me, that I may take fast hold upon thy word, and never let it go!

He does mean too, I think, by saying, "after thy lovingkindness," that he desires to be quickened by a sense of God's love. Is there anything that puts life into a man like that? A mother finds her babe half frozen, and she warms it back to life by pressing it to her bosom; she imparts the warmth of her own heart to it until it lives again and smiles: it is just so with our God,—there is no reviving us except by pressing us close to his bosom. Did I hear you say, "I will repent in terror. I will go to Moses to get revival"? I advise you not to do so, for he will use the rod most severely, and flog you back to feeling; and

that is by no means a desirable method. Divine love is a sweeter and surer quickener. The true elixir of life is love. Oh, for a draught of it!

> "Thy mercy is more than a match for my heart,
> Which wonders to feel its own deadness depart,
> Aroused by thy goodness I rise from the ground,
> And sing to the praise of the mercy I've found."

"Quicken me after thy lovingkindness."

I would close this section of my discourse by saying, *it is a prayer which has a promise attached to it.* It was not so in David's day; but in these latter times we have a promise which fits it as the wax the seal. When I have a lock I am always glad to find a key which fits it. Here is the lock—"Lord, I feel as if I were dead;" and here is the key—"He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." That answers the supplication as a glove fits the hand—"Though he were dead, yet shall he live." If it were possible for a believer to get between the jaws of death and stand there, the mouth of the sepulchre could not close itself upon him. Look at Jonah; he is in the whale's belly, and the whale is in the great deeps, far down from the light of day. Surely it was the very belly of Hades to him, but it could not be his grave. The great fish had an indigestible morsel within him at that time; he could not possibly consume the prophet, because he believed the truth of God with a living faith. He soon escaped after he had uttered his creed; and this was his creed, "Salvation is of the Lord." With that confession of faith in your heart no power can destroy you, no belly of hell can swallow you up; you must live, for so it is written, "Though he were dead, yet shall he live." Plead that promise, and cry unto God, when you feel sloth creeping over you—"Quicken me, that I may keep the testimony of thy mouth."

III. We part with David, and this is the last word: in this verse we have HIS HOLY EXAMPLE, which I commend to you.

First, *offer the prayer of life when you feel that you are dead.* It is a strange paradox; but I put it with all my might to you. If this morning you are forced to cry, "My heart seems like adamant; my feeling is all gone; if aught is felt it is only pain to find I cannot feel; I seem to be altogether out of sorts; if the life of God be in me at all it is like a spark hidden away among the ashes, and I cannot discover it:" well, then, bestir yourselves to pray. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Let thy groan go up from the grave's mouth. If thou canst get no further than a sigh, let thy moaning be addressed to God, let the heavings of thine anguished heart move towards thy heavenly Father. Let prayer arise like smoke from the altar towards heaven: "Quicken me: quicken me." Such a prayer will prove an antidote to the poison of death. Though your bones lie scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cleaveth wood upon the earth, yet if the sighing of your soul be towards quickening you shall be brought up again. "Thy dead men shall live." From between the very ribs of death there shall come a higher, better, and diviner life. Breathe, then, thy desire in prayer after this fashion,—"Lord, thy poor, dead servant cries to thee for life." Do not say, "It is such an odd prayer; it is so singular, therefore it cannot be correct." I gather that

it is genuine because it is so singular that no one would borrow it from his neighbour. In spiritual life that which is according to usual routine is often false, and that which is so strange that only a personal experience could have suggested it, is most probably correct. Therefore I say again to you who seem as if you were dead, let this prayer go up, "Lord, quicken me," and he will enlighten you by his Holy Spirit.

The next thing I learn is this, that *living truth can only be held firmly by living men.* Some who are very sound are nothing else but sound; but we want no such allies. Some of those who hold a correct creed are very narrow, and will not tolerate a departure by a hair's-breadth from their fixed opinion; but narrowness is not strength. To know the truth and feel its power, and manifest its influence in your life, is the proof that you have grappled it to your soul as with hooks of steel. A dead creed in a dead man's hand is like dead wheat in the grip of an Egyptian mummy; what can come of it? But observe carefully a living man, with living seed to sow, for you shall see a harvest yet. A living man who grasps a living truth is mighty as Moses with Aaron's rod in his hand which had life in it, for it budded and blossomed, and brought forth almonds. Such a rod as this can divide the Red Sea, and fetch waters out of flinty rocks. Oh, for living truth in the grip of a living man! My dear friend, if you are going to be a champion of reformation, first be yourself reformed; if you would become a defender of the faith, first be an exemplifier of it. Let Jesus reign in your soul, and then he will make you a priest and king unto himself by his own divine power.

The next lesson is, *regard God's lovingkindness as a source of life.* Unhappily too many have viewed it as an excuse for death. "Oh, yes," they say, "I am one of God's chosen; I need not trouble myself about holiness or activity. I shall be saved by sovereign grace." Do you sit down and quietly cross your legs, and fold your arms, and do nothing, and then look to be rewarded for it? In all probability you will be lost at last, for you are lost already. The man who dares to pervert truth is already a lost man; but he that knows the lovingkindness of the Lord says, "Quicken thou me, Lord. Such love as this I must translate into life: grant that to me to live may be love." Those words "love" and "live" are very near akin in their conformation; they are joined together in spiritual things, let no man put them asunder. Do not get behind the door and suck your honeycomb, and say, "I love enjoyment, but I hate employment. I never try to defend the truth or to spread it, but it is very sweet to me." Ah, my dear sir, that kind of honey will poison you; the thought of it makes me sick. The right thing is to feel that the more God loves you the more you love him; the more he does for you the more will you do for him.

"Loved of my God, for him again
With love intense I burn;
Chosen of him ere time began,
I choose him in return."

"Quicken me after thy lovingkindness."

And lastly, *let divine aid, whenever we seek it or obtain it, lead us to the practical use of it in obedience.* "Quicken me," and "so shall I keep." I put those words together in that fashion, for they are together.

That is to say, if the Lord gives quickening I will give steadfastness. The believer is active, not passive. He is acted on, but he also acts. In the first work of regeneration we are passive: that must be a pure act of God's grace; but as the child as soon as it is born becomes active, and begins to cry, so does a new-born soul prove its activity by its prayer. As the child ever after has an activity all its own in proportion to the measure of its vitality, so will it be with the child of God: he becomes more and more energetic in proportion as God pours into him more and more of the divine life. Come, ye that lie in the dust, shake yourselves from it; ye that are at ease in Zion, bestir yourselves in the service of your Lord and Master before a heavy woe overwhelms you. This is an evil day, a day in which multitudes are perishing in poverty and sin by reason of their ignorance of Christ; will ye not instruct them? This is a day of blasphemy and rebuke, in which the truth of God is cast down and trodden like mire in the streets; will ye not stand up for it? If ye come not to-day to the help of the Lord and his truth, then shall ye be cursed like the inhabitants of Meroz of old: but oh, I charge you, men of God, who live by faith on the Son of God, feed ye upon him and be strong, and then quit yourselves like men, and keep his testimonies in the teeth of an infidel world and a philosophising church. Hold you to the fundamentals of the faith, though with others the foundations are shaken. Abide like rocks in the midst of foaming billows, and defy all opposition. Stand fast in the house of your God below, and this shall be your reward above—"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out." May the best of blessings rest upon you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxix. 81-104.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SPRINKLING OF THE BLOOD OF THE SACRIFICE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 11TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the vail of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation; and shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation."—Leviticus iv. 6, 7.

I HAVE aforetime preached to you upon the types of our Lord's sacrifice: the subject is as large as it is important. We began with the laying of the hands upon the offering, and we went on to the all-important matter of the slaying of the victim.* Now we come to the use which was made of the blood of the sacrifice after it had been slain. In thinking upon this subject, I seem to hear a voice saying to me, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." This is the central mystery of our religion, it becomes us to be reverent in heart as we approach it. The doctrine of substitution is the heart of the whole matter, our whole heart needs to be aroused while we speak upon it. The Son of God himself, assuming human nature, and in that nature bleeding and dying in our place and stead, is the revelation of revelation, the wonder of wonders, the glory of the glorious God. Solemnity and awe may well fill us while we meditate on such a theme. Oh, that the Spirit of God may rest upon us now! May his melting power be over this vast assembly! May the speaker feel it, may the hearers experience it, so that we may with one consent, in spirit and in truth, look to him who, by the Eternal Spirit, offered up himself without spot unto God!

The sacrifices under the law were varied according to the uppermost thoughts in the offerers' minds and their peculiar conditions before God. A burnt-offering, a peace-offering, or a sin-offering might be brought, according as men wished to give unto the Lord, to have fellowship with him, or to confess their sin to him. There was a sacrifice specially arranged for the anointed priest, another for all the congregation, another for a ruler, and yet another for one of the common people:

* See "Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit," Nos. 1771 and 1772.

in truth the typical sacrifices all pointed to the one great sacrifice, but they indicated various marks and characteristics of the undivided Lamb of God. The victims varied from a bullock or a lamb down to a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. We take different views of the sacrifice of Christ according to our capacity to see it; and yet all these views may be quite in accordance with truth, for the atonement is many-sided, and operates in many directions. The Levitical types represent the different views which believing minds take of our Lord Jesus Christ: they set forth but one Christ, but that one Christ from various stand-points. The mercy is that the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus is suitable to you, and equally suitable to me, and to all that come to him by faith. The rich, the poor, the brave, the timid, the amiable, and the immoral, all find in Jesus that which fits the individual case. You may be a person of great mind and profound thought, but you shall find in Jesus all that your high intelligence can desire. I may be a person of slender education and of narrow powers of thought, but I shall find the Lord Jesus humbling himself to my limited capacity. The manna is said by the rabbis to have pleased every man's taste, and even so the Christ of God is every man's Christ, so that no man who comes to him shall be disappointed, but each shall find his need supplied. Each man shall find his case perfectly met by the Saviour's atonement, as much so as if Jesus were prepared for that man only, as if that man were the only sinner under heaven, or Jesus a Redeemer sent to him alone of all the family of man. Oh, the depth of the wisdom and of the grace of God in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Note particularly, with great interest, that there were sacrifices provided for sins of ignorance under the law: therefore we safely conclude that a sin of ignorance is a sin. There is not that intensity of evil in a sin of ignorance which is to be seen in wilful, deliberate transgression; but still there is sin in it: for no law can allow ignorance to be an excuse for trespass, since it is the duty of the subject to know the law. Even if I do that which is wrong with a sincere wish to do right, still my wrong act has a measure of sin in it. No amount of sincerity can turn injustice into righteousness, or transform falsehood into truth. You can illustrate this by the stern facts of nature. Certain inventors have thought that they could fly, and they have in perfectly honest faith leaped from a lofty crag; but their honest belief has not saved them from the result of violating the law of gravitation: they have fallen to the ground, and have been dashed in pieces just as surely and terribly as if they had felt no real belief in their powers of flight. If a man partakes of a deadly poison believing it to be a health-giving medicine, his sincerity will not hinder the natural course of nature: he will die in his error. It is precisely so in the moral and spiritual world. Sins committed in ignorance must be still sins in the sight of the Lord, or else no expiation would have been provided for them. Without shedding of blood there is no remission even for sins of ignorance. Paul persecuted the saints ignorantly, but he thereby incurred sins which required to be washed away; so Ananias told him, and so he felt, for he called himself the chief of sinners because he persecuted the church of God. When the people sinned through ignorance, and the thing was

hid from the eyes of the assembly, they were to bring an offering as soon as the sin was known. If you have transgressed ignorantly, my brother, the time may come when you will find out that you were sinning, and it will then rejoice your heart to find that the Lord Jesus has made atonement for your sins before you knew them to be sins.

I am greatly rejoiced to think there should be such a sacrifice provided, since it may yet turn out that the larger number of our sins are sins of which we have not been aware, because the hardness of our heart has prevented our discovering our error. You may have sinned and have no conscience of that sin at this present, ay, and you never may have a conscience of that particular offence, in this world, yet will it be sin all the same. Many good men have lived in an evil habit, and remained in it unto death, and yet have not known it to be evil. Now, if the precious blood of Jesus only put away the sin which we perceived in detail, its efficacy would be limited by the enlightenment of our conscience, and therefore some grievous sin might be overlooked and prove our ruin: but inasmuch as this blood puts away all sins, it removes those which we do not discover as well as those over which we mourn. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults" is a prayer to which the expiation of Christ is a full answer. The atonement acts according to God's sight of sin and not according to our sight of it, for we only see it in part, but God sees it all and blots it all out. When we discover our iniquity it is ours to weep over it with true and deep repentance; but if there be some sins which in detail we have not discerned, and consequently have not by a specific act of repentance confessed them separately, yet, for all that, the Lord doth put away our sin; for it is written, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from *all* sin." Those unknown sufferings of Christ which the Greek Liturgy mentions so wisely, have put away from us those unknown sins which we cannot confess in detail because we have not yet perceived them. Blessed be God for a sacrifice which cleanses away for ever not only our glaring faults, but those offences which the most minute self-examination has not yet uncovered.

After the blood had been spilt by the killing of the sacrifice, and thus atonement had been made, three several acts were to be performed by the priest: we have them described in our text; and if you will kindly look you will see that very much the same words follow in the seventeenth and eighteenth verses, so also in the twenty-fifth verse, and in the thirty-fourth verse, where with somewhat less of detail much the same act is set forth. "And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the vail of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of the congregation; and shall pour all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." All this is symbolic of the work of the Lord Jesus and the manifold effects of his blood.

There were three things: first, "the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the vail of the sanctuary": this represents *the atoning sacrifice in its reference to God.* Next, "The priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord:" this sets forth

the influence of the blood upon the offering of intercessory prayer. Thirdly, we read, "he shall pour all (the rest) of the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering": this displays *the influence of the blood of Christ on all our service for the Lord.* Oh, for the Spirit's power to us to show the things of Christ!

I. We begin with THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST IN ITS RELATION TO THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL.

In the type before us *the prominent thing before God is the blood of atonement.* No mention is made of a meat-offering, or a drink-offering, or even of sweet spices upon the golden altar; the one conspicuous object is blood. This was sprinkled before the Lord before the vail of the Most Holy place. I am well aware that some persons cry out, "The preacher continually talks about blood, and this morning from the first hymn to the last he has brought before us constant allusions to blood. We are horrified by it!" I wish you to be horrified; for, indeed, sin is a thing to shudder at, and the death of Jesus is not a matter to be treated lightly. It was God's intent to awaken in man a great disgust of sin, by making him see that it could only be put away by suffering and death. In the Tabernacle in the wilderness almost everything was sanctified by blood. The purple drops fell even on the book, and all the people. The blood was to be seen everywhere. As soon as you entered the outer court you saw the great brazen altar; and at the base of it bowls of blood were constantly being poured out. When you passed the first vail and entered the holy place, if you saw a priest he was bespattered from head to foot with blood, his snow-white robes bringing the crimson spots most vividly before the eye. If you looked around, you saw the horns of the golden altar of incense smeared with blood, and the gorgeous vail which hid the innermost sanctuary was bedewed with a frequent sprinkling of the same. The holy tent was by no means a place for sentimentalists; its emblematic teachings dealt with terrible realities, in a boldly impressive manner; its ritual was not constructed to gratify the taste, but to impress the mind. It was not a place for dainty gentlemen, but for broken-hearted sinners. Everywhere the ignorant eye would see somewhat to displease; but the troubled conscience would read lessons of peace and pardon. Oh, that any words of mine could cause trifiers with sin to be shocked at the abominable thing! I would have them filled with horror of that detestable thing which cannot be put away except by that which is infinitely more calculated to shock the instructed mind than rivers of the blood of bulls and of goats—I mean the sacrifice of God's own Son, whose soul was made an offering for sin.

The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled before the vail seven times, signifying this—first, that *the atonement made by the blood of Jesus is perfect in its reference to God.* All through the Scriptures, as you well know, seven is the number of perfection, and in this place it is doubtless used with that intent. The seven times is the same as once for all: it conveys the same meaning as when we read, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins," and again, "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once." It is a complete act. In this text we understand that the Lord Jesus offered unto the justice of God an absolutely complete and satisfactory atonement by his vicarious suffering and death for

guilty men. There is no need of further offering for sin. "It is finished." He hath by himself purged our sins. In old time, before the coming of our Lord, the vail hung darkly between the place of God's glorious presence and his worshipping people: it was only lifted for a moment once a year, and then that one only of all living men might enter into the Holy of Holies for a brief space, the way into the Holiest not being yet made manifest; but still the blood was sprinkled towards the place where the glory of God was pleased to dwell; indicating that access to him could only be by the way of the blood. Albeit that modern thought will contradict me, I shall not cease to assert perpetually that the greatest result of the death of the Lord Jesus was God-ward. Not only does he reconcile us unto God by his death, and turn our enmity into love, but he has borne the chastisement of our peace, and thus magnified the law and made it honourable. God, the Judge of all, is enabled without the violation of his justice to pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin. The blood of the sin-offering was sprinkled before the Lord because the sin was before the Lord. David says—"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," and the prodigal cries, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee." The sacrifice of Christ is so mainly a propitiation before God, so thoroughly a vindication of divine righteousness, that this one view of the atonement is sufficient for any man, even if he obtains no other; but let him beware of trusting to a faith which does not look to the great propitiation. This is the soul-saving view; the idea which pacifies conscience and wins the heart: we believe in Jesus as the propitiation for sin. The lights which stream from the cross are very varied; but as all the coloured rays are found in the white light of day, so all the varied teachings of Calvary meet in the fact that Jesus suffered for sin, the just for the unjust. Do not your hearts feel glad to think that the Lord Jesus Christ has offered a perfect atonement, covering all, removing every obstacle to the mercy of God, making a clear way for the Lord most justly to justify the guilty? No man need bring anything more, or anything of his own, wherewith to turn away the anger of God; but he may come just as he is, guilty and defiled, and plead this precious blood which has made effectual atonement for him. O my soul, endorse the doctrine, feel the sweet experiences that flow from it, and stand thou now in the presence of God without fear: for seven times has the blood spoken for thee unto God.

Note next, that not only is the atonement itself perfect, but that *the presentation of that atonement is perfect, too.* The sevenfold sprinkling was typical of Christ as a Priest presenting unto the Father himself as a sacrifice for sin. This has been fully done. Jesus has in due order carried the propitiation into the sanctuary, and appeared in the presence of God on our behalf. Here are the apostle's own words, "by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." It is not our presenting of the blood, but Christ's presenting of the blood, which has made the atonement; even as it is not *our* sight of the blood, but Jehovah's sight of it which causes us to escape; as it was written concerning the Passover, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." Jesus at this moment sets his atonement within view of a righteous God, and therefore is the Judge of all the

earth, able to look on the guilty with eyes of mercy. Let us rest perfectly satisfied that all we require to bring us near to God has been done for us, and we may now come boldly unto the throne of the heavenly grace.

"No longer far from God: but now
By precious blood made nigh,
Accepted in the well-beloved
Near to his heart we lie."

We now pass on to a few thoughts about ourselves in relation to this type. This sevenfold sprinkling of the blood upon the vail meant that *the way of our access to God is only by virtue of the precious blood of Christ.* Do you ever feel a vail hanging between you and God? In very truth, there is none; for Jesus has taken it away through his flesh. In the day when his blessed body was offered up, the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, showing that there is nothing now to divide the believer from his God; but still, if you think there is such a separating vail, if you feel as if the Lord had hidden himself, if you are so despondent that you are afraid you never can draw near to the mercy-seat, then sprinkle the blood *towards* the throne of grace, cast it on the very vail which appears to conceal your God from you. Let your heart go towards God even if you cannot reach him, and let this blood go before you; for rest assured nothing can dissolve obstacles and furnish you with an open access to God save the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Rest assured that you are already come unto God if boldly, ay, even if timidly with trembling finger, you do but sprinkle the blood in the direction which your faith longs to take. If you cannot present the atonement of Christ yourself by the firm hand of an undaunted faith; yet, remember, Christ's own hand has presented the propitiation long before, and therefore the work will not fail because of your feebleness. O that by a simple confidence in the Lord, your Redeemer, you may this day imitate the example of the priest under the law, for Jesus makes you a priest by the gospel. You may now look towards the Lord and plead that all-prevailing blood which makes us near who were once afar off. I have often admired that blessed gospel precept, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;" for suppose I cannot see, yet if I look I have the promise of being saved. If there should be a mist and a cloud between me and the brazen serpent, yet if I look that way I shall be healed. If I cannot clearly discern all the glories of my Lord and Saviour, yet if I look with the glance of trust he saveth me. Turn, then, your half-opened eyes, which only at one corner admit light, turn them I say, God-ward and Christ-ward, and know that by reason of the atoning blood you are saved. The blood-bespattered way is the only one which a sinner's feet can traverse if he would come to God. It is easy, plain and open. See, the priest had the gospel at his fingers' ends; at every motion of his hand he preached it, and the effect of such preaching remained wherever the drops found a resting-place.

I further think that the blood was sprinkled on the vail seven times *to show that a deliberate contemplation of the death of Christ is greatly for our benefit.* Whatever else you treat slightly, let the sacrifice of Calvary be seriously considered again and again; even unto seven times

let it be meditated on! Read the story of our Lord's death in the four Evangelists and ponder every detail till you are familiar with his griefs. I would have you know the story by heart, for nothing will do your heart so much good. Read over the twenty-second Psalm and the fifty-third of Isaiah every day if you are in any kind of trouble of heart about sin, and pray to God for enlightenment that you may see the exceeding greatness of his grace to us in Christ Jesus. Oh, that you may with all your heart believe in the Lamb of God! Angels desire to look into these things, therefore, I pray you, do not neglect so great salvation. Think lovingly of the atoning sacrifice; earnestly consider it a second time, do it a third time, do it a fourth time, do it a fifth time, do it a sixth time, do it a seventh time!

Remember, too, that *this sets out how great our guilt has been*, since the blood must be sprinkled seven times ere the work of atonement is fully seen by you. Our guilt has a sevenfold blackness about it, and there must be a sevenfold cleansing. If you plead the blood of Jesus once and you do not obtain peace thereby, plead it again; and if still the burden lies upon your heart, still go on pleading with the Lord the one prevailing argument that Jesus bled. If for the present you do not gain peace through the blood of the cross, do not conclude that your sin is too great for pardon, for that is not the fact, since "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." A fuller acquaintance with him who has made peace by his blood will calm the tempest of your mind. Christ is a great Saviour for great sinners, and his precious blood can remove the blackest spots of iniquity. See it sprinkled seven times for a seven times polluted sinner, and rest your soul on him though seven devils should have entered into you. God, who bids us forgive unto seventy times seven, sets no bound to his own forgiveness.

Do reflect that *if your case seems to yourself to be very difficult, it is provided for by this sevenfold sprinkling of the blood.* If you say, "My heart is so hard! I cannot make it feel"; or if you say, "I am so frivolous and foolish I seem to forget what once I knew"; then continue still to look to the blood of Jesus, and draw hope from it even to seven times. Do not go away from *that*, I charge you—where else can you go? The devil's desire will be to keep you from thinking upon Christ; but do remember that thoughts about anything else will do you very little good. Your hope lies in thinking upon Jesus, not upon yourself. Masticate and digest such a text as this every morning—"He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Go to bed at night with this verse upon your tongue, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Or this, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." That dear man of God, Mr. Moody Stuart, somewhere tells us that he once talked with a woman who was in great trouble about her sins. She was a well-instructed person, and knew the Bible thoroughly, so that he was in a little difficulty what to say to her, as she was so accustomed to all-saving truth. At last he urged upon her very strongly that passage, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," and he noticed that she seemed to find a quiet relief in a gentle flow of tears. He prayed with her, and when she rose from her knees she seemed much comforted. Meeting her the next day, and seeing her

smiling face, and finding her full of rest in the Lord, he asked, "What was it wrought your deliverance?" "Oh," she said, "it was that text, 'Jesus Christ came to save sinners.'" "Did you not know that before?" said Mr. Stuart. Yes, she knew the words before, but she found that in her heart of hearts she had believed that Jesus came to save *saints*, and not sinners. Do not many awakened persons abide in the same error? Well, I want you, poor troubled heart, ay, and you also who are of a joyful spirit, to keep on with this sevenfold presentation of the sacrifice of Christ unto God; and even if a vail should hang between you and the Lord, I beg you to continue to sprinkle the vail with blood until before the eyes of your faith the vail rends in twain, and you stand in the presence of your reconciled God, rejoicing in Christ Jesus.

II. Our second head is this,—THE BLOOD IN ITS INFLUENCE UPON PRAYER. "The priest shall put some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord." The priest in this case goes from the inside of the holy place towards the outer court; having dealt with the vail of the Holy of Holies, he turns round and finds close at his side the altar of incense made of gold, and surmounted with a golden crown; to this he goes deliberately, and places a portion of the blood upon each of its horns. Horns signify power, and the explanation of the symbol is that there is no power in intercessory prayer apart from the blood of expiation.

Remember, first, that *the intercession of Christ* himself *is based upon his atonement.* He is daily pleading before the throne of God, and his great argument is that he offered himself without spot unto God. It seems to me most clear and blessed that our Lord Jesus makes this the main plea with the Father on our behalf—"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." He has suffered in our stead, and every day he pleads these sufferings for us: his blood speaketh better things than that of Abel. He seeks no new plea, but always urges this old one—his blood shed for many for the remission of sins. "It pleased the Father to bruise him," and now it pleases the Father to hear him. The bruised spices of his passion are an incense of sweet smell, and derive a double acceptance from the blood-smeared altar upon which they are presented.

And now take the type to yourselves. You and I are to offer incense upon this golden altar by our daily intercession for others, but *our plea must always be the atoning blood of Jesus.* I pray you, dear friends, to urge this much more than you have been accustomed to do in your prayers. We are to cry to God for sinners, and we are to cry to God for saints, but the sacrifice of Jesus must be our strength in petitioning. Intercession is one of the most excellent duties in which a Christian man can be engaged: it has about it the honour both of priesthood and kingship. The incense-altar ought to be continually smoking before the Lord God of Israel, not only in our public prayer-meetings, but in our private supplications. We should be continually pleading for our children, for our friends, for our neighbours, for those who are hopeful, and those who seem hopeless; but the great plea must always be, "By thine agony and bloody sweat; by thy cross and passion." Offer sweet spices of love, and faith, and hope, and lay on

the burning coals of strong desire, but on the horn of your altar smear the blood.

"Blood has a voice to pierce the skies,
'*Revenge*' the blood of Abel cries;
But the rich blood of Jesus slain
Speaks '*peace*' as loud from every vein."

Take care you never advance another plea, or if another let it be very subsidiary to this master reason. We may say, "O Lord, save men; because their immortal souls are precious; save them that they may escape from endless misery, and that they may display the power of thy grace; save them also that thy word may not return unto thee void, and that thy church may be built up by their means"; but we must never be content with these pleas; we must go on to plead the name of Jesus, for whatsoever we ask in that name we shall receive. He who once poured out his soul unto death, and now maketh intercession for the transgressors, will see to it that our pleadings shall not be rejected. In all our intercessions we must remember Calvary; the incense altar for us must on the horn of its strength be always sprinkled with the blood.

And, dearly beloved, as this must be the plea of our intercession, so it must be *our impulse in making intercession.* When we pray we come, as it were, to this golden altar, and we look thereon: what is that we see? Stains of blood! We look again, and again see crimson spots, while all the four horns are red with blood. Did my Lord pour out his soul unto death for men, and shall not I pour out my soul in living earnest when I pray? Can you now bow your knee to plead with God and not feel your heart set upon the good of men, when you see that your Lord has laid down his life that they may be saved? Cold prayers and dull pleadings would vanish if we would but remember how Jesus loved; how being in an agony he sweat as it were great drops of blood. Brethren, we are sadly blameworthy for neglect of intercessory prayer. I cannot tell how much of blessing is being withheld, because we do not pray importunately for our fellow-men. May the Lord arouse us! May he never permit us to neglect the precious use of the mercy-seat! When the late Dr. Bacchus was ill, and near to die, a surgeon visited him, and as he went out of the door, he was observed to speak to the servant. The good old divine begged the attendant to tell him what the surgeon said. After some pause he said, "Dear Sir, he told me not to leave you, for you could not live more than another half-hour." "Then," said the saint, "help me out of bed, let me get upon my knees and spend my last half hour on earth in praying for the church of God, and for the salvation of men." What a blessed way of spending one's last half-hour; let me rather say—what a blessed way of spending half-an-hour at any time! Try it this afternoon! I do not know any method of benefiting our friends which is more constantly open to us all than that of intercessory prayer; and I cannot give you a better argument why you should use it than this, that your Lord has sprinkled the golden altar of intercession with his own blood. Where he poured out his blood, will not you pour out your tears? He has given his bleeding heart for men, will not you give your pleading lips?

I think, too, I must say that this smearing of the horns of the altar with blood is meant to *give us very great encouragement and assurance*

whenever we come to God in prayer. Never give anybody up, however bad he may be. If you know a man that is as much like the devil as two peas are like each other, still have hope for him, because when you come to the golden altar to offer your prayers on his behalf what do you see? Why, there is the blood of Christ. What sin is there which it cannot remove? "Oh," you say, "did Jesus die for sinners like this man, and shall I despair of him, and therefore refuse to pray for him?" This is logical argument. We are slow to labour for men because we are slow of heart in expecting their salvation, and this arises out of our narrow views of our Lord Jesus. I pray you enlarge your ideas of God's mercy and of Christ's power to cleanse. Pray not with a phantom hope, but with solid confidence, and say, "Lord, I do but follow with my tears where thou hast been with thy blood. I am pleading for this man's pardon, and thou art also making intercession for transgressors. I am pleading for those whom thou hast bought with thy blood, and therefore I am confident that my desire is in consonance with thy will, and that I shall be heard in heaven, thy dwelling-place." When we pray, let us with vehement desire plead the blood of Jesus Christ. Perhaps fewer petitions, and more urging of the merit of Christ, would make better prayers. If we were shorter in what we ask for, but longer in pleading the reason why we should obtain, we might prevail more easily. I suggest that we use fewer nails; but take care that those nails are driven in with Calvary's blood-stained hammer, and clenched with this argument, "For Jesus' sake." May this sort of prayer be used by us all in private and in public, and then we must and shall prevail.

III. Time flies too quickly this morning, and therefore I must pass over many things I had thought to dwell upon. The last point is, THE BLOOD IN ITS INFLUENCE UPON ALL OUR SERVICE. You see we have been coming outwards from the vail to the golden altar, and now we pass outside the holy place into the outer court, and there in the open air stands the great brazen altar,—the first object that the Israelite saw when he entered the sacred precincts. As soon as ever he entered into the first enclosure his eye lighted upon the great altar of brass upon which burnt-offerings were burned, and oblations were presented unto the Lord. It was at the foot of this brazen altar that the bowls of blood were poured out continually, so that the altar was encrimsoned with it, and the soil around was soaked with the sanguine flood.

That altar represents a great many things, and among the rest our Lord Jesus presenting himself to God as an acceptable sacrifice. Whenever you think of our Lord as being an offering of a sweet smell unto God, never dissociate that fact in your mind from his being slain for sin, for *all our Lord's service is tinged by his atoning death.* It is a great mistake when you are trying to explain any one of the Levitical sacrifices to run entirely upon one line, for there is a blessed union of all of them in Christ. The offerings of a sweet savour were all of them in a sense sin-offerings: there are clear indications of this. At the same time the sin-offering was not altogether an abomination, but in part a sweet savour offering, for the fat, as we have seen in our reading, was presented upon the altar. What God hath joined together let no man put asunder. You may look at your Lord under various headings,

and separately think of his life and of his death; but never stereotype even that division, for his death was the climax of his life, and his life was necessary to his death. Always think of Jesus in all your meditations upon him as presenting himself to God and pouring out his soul unto death by way of atonement. When I see that great brazen altar I do not forget how our Lord was accepted of God, but when I see the floods of blood at the foot of the altar I am reminded of the fact that "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree."

Viewing the type in reference to ourselves, let us learn that *whenever we come to offer any sacrifice unto the Lord we must take care that we present it by virtue of the precious blood of Christ.* The worship of this morning—God knows our hearts, he knows how many have really adored him, and he knows out of those who do worship, how many of us have presented our sacrifice, thinking only of the merit of Jesus as the reason why it should be received. When you rise from your knees after your morning prayer, have you really pleaded the precious blood? Your petitions will not else be acceptable to God. When you are praying at eventide, and speaking with your heavenly Father, have you your eye upon Christ? If not, your devotion will be rejected. As it is with worship in the form of prayer, so is it with worship in the form of praise. Sweet sounds are very delightful when we sing the praises of God, but unless the altar be blood-stained upon which we lay our psalms and hymns, they will not be accepted for all their music. We also bring to God our gifts as he prospers us; I trust we are all ready to give him a portion of our substance; but do we present it upon the altar which sanctifieth the giver and the gift? Do we see the blood of Christ upon it, and present our gold and silver through that which is more precious far? If not, we might as well retain our money in our purse. When you go this afternoon to your Sunday-school classes, or go out into the streets to preach, or go round with your tracts, will you present your holy labour to God through the precious blood? There is but one altar on which he will accept your services, that altar is the person of his dear Son, and in this matter Jesus must be viewed as pouring out his blood for us. We must view the atonement as connected with every holy thing. I believe that our testimonies for God will be blessed of God in proportion as we keep the sacrifice of Christ to the forefront. Somebody asked our brother, Mr. Moody, how it was that he was so successful, and he is said to have replied, "Well, if I must tell you, it is I believe because we come out fair and square upon the doctrine of substitution." In that remark he hit the nail on the head. That is the saving doctrine; keep that before your own mind, keep it before the minds of those whom you would benefit. Let the Lord see that you are always thinking of his dear Son.

And, beloved, do you not think that this pouring of the blood at the foot of this brazen altar indicates to us *how much we ought to bring there?* If Jesus has brought his life there, and laid himself thereon, ought we not to bring all that we are and all that we have, and consecrate all to God? Let us not offer a lean, scraggy sacrifice, or one that is half dead, or broken, or diseased; but let us bring our best at its best, and

cheerfully present it unto the Most High through the precious blood. One said of a young man who had lately joined the church, "Is he O and O?" and another answered, "What do you mean by that?" "Why," said the first, "I mean,—Is he out and out for Christ? Does he give himself spirit, soul, and body to Jesus?" Surely, when we see the altar with Christ himself upon it, and his blood poured out there, we must acknowledge that if we could spend our whole life in zealous labour, and then die a martyr's death, we should not have rendered even half what such amazing love deserves. Let us be stimulated and quickened by the sight of the blood upon the brazen altar!

Lastly, you notice the blood was poured out *at the bottom of the altar*. What could that mean but this—that *the altar of thank-offering stood upon and grew out of a basis of blood.* So all our deeds for God, our sacrifices for his cause, must spring out of the love which he has manifested in the death of his dear Son. We love him because—you know the "because"—because he first loved us. And how do we know that he loves us? Behold the death of Jesus as the surest proof. I long to put my whole being upon that altar, and I should feel as I did so that I was not giving my God anything, but only rendering to him what his dear Son has bought a million times over by once shedding his life-blood. When we have done all, we shall be unprofitable servants, and we shall say so. All that we have given to God has been presented out of gratitude for the fact that God so loved us that he gave his only begotten Son to die for us that we might live through him. Load the altar! Heap it high! Let hecatombs smoke thereon, for it is built upon God's unspeakable gift. When sin is removed, service is accepted;—"then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar." Attempt no offering of your own works till then, for unpardoned sinners bring unaccepted offerings. First, let the blood be recognized, and let the full atonement be rejoiced in. Service rendered to God with a desire for personal merit is abominable in his sight; but when our merit is all found in the divine person of his Son, then will he accept us and our offering too in Christ Jesus. God grant unto you, dear hearers, to be accepted in the Beloved. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Leviticus iv. 1—21; Isaiah liii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—429, 285, 282.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

TWO PAULS AND A BLINDED SORCERER.

A Sermon,

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 18TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."—Acts xiii. 12.

CYPRUS was by no means a reputable island: it was devoted to the goddess Venus, and you can imagine what her worship was, and what would be the fruitful licentiousness which sprang of it. It was the native country of Barnabas, and, as he was at first the leader of the missionary party sent out by the church of Antioch, it was fit that Barnabas and Saul should begin preaching there. Landing at one end of the island the two apostolic men traversed it till they came to Paphos, where the Roman governor resided. Now, this Paphos was the central city of the worship of Venus, and was the scene of frequent profligate processions and abominable rites. We might call it "the place where Satan's seat is." Athanasius styled its religion "the deification of lust." Neither men nor women could resort to the shrine of Venus without being defiled in mind and depraved in character. Yet it was no business of the apostles to stop away either from Cyprus or Paphos because they were the resorts of the gay and vicious; but the rather there was a special need for them to go thither with the purifying waters of the gospel. The more wicked the locality the more need for Christian effort in that very spot. Moreover, the Holy Ghost had sent the missionaries to Cyprus, and therefore they might safely enter the caverns of dark obscenity, and proclaim the word of salvation among the openly abandoned. Nor need they fear of success, for publicans and harlots have frequently been known to enter the kingdom before self-righteous Pharisees. Even the vilest of open sin is not so hard to deal with as a proud heart, which abhors the doctrine of the cross because of its humbling character. Let us not refuse to plough up any kind of soil: great harvests come from broken rocks.

Happily for the two servants of the Lord, God had prepared their way as he prepares the way of all his servants; for whenever he sends a sower forth to sow, albeit that a part of the land which he sows may be rock, or trodden path, yet there is always a portion which is ploughed before the sower comes. God has a prepared people wherever he sends a

minister to gather them in. He doth not mock us by sending us upon fruitless errands. If he bids Philip go down to the way which leads from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert, Philip does not find it a desert spiritually, for there he gathers one of the sweetest flowers that ever bloomed in the garden of the Lord. So now, when Barnabas and Saul come to Paphos it shall not be to break their hearts over the filthiness and obscenity of its idol worship, but to find for the Lord a jewel amid the mire. The chief magistrate of the island was a candid, studious, prudent man; he possessed an intelligent and inquisitive spirit, and was desirous to know all that could be known. Pliny mentioned him among the authors from whom he quoted. This man was anxious to discover the truth if it could be discovered: he had said *with* Pilate, but not *as* Pilate, "What is truth?" A certain Jew who was expert in the dark learning of the East, and practised sorcery, had obtained considerable influence over this ruler, whose name was Sergius Paul; but instead of teaching him the truth this false-hearted Jew imparted to him the mysteries of the Magi, and the superstitions of sorcery. Bar-jesus was this mountebank's Jewish name, but he was false to it, for he was no son of Jesus, but one of a generation of vipers. Sergius Paul hearing that there were other Eastern teachers in the island, and being dissatisfied with the teaching of Elymas, sent for Barnabas and Saul to teach him the word of God. What a door of hope for this prudent man! What a splendid opening for the two preachers of Christ! Barnabas and Saul can go to court and hold a meeting in the proconsul's palace, with one of the best of hearers as the centre of their congregation; for a really prudent man is one of the most hopeful of listeners to the gospel if his prudence has not curdled into sophistry, and his knowledge has not fermented into self-conceit. It was a hopeful omen for the rest of the island that its proconsul was so free from prejudice that he called the two missionaries to his hall, and desired to hear from them the word of God. Barnabas and Saul accepted the invitation, and I think I see them both opening their commission in the deputy's presence. Good will surely come of such an opportunity; we are all looking for memorable results; but, stop, we must postpone our hopes awhile, and look around upon facts.

I. Notice first, OPPOSITION TO THE FAITH. The missionaries were not to have it all their own way; Bar-jesus, who was also called Elymas, "withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith." As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses when he commenced his mission, so this Jew Bar-jesus opposed himself to the ministers of Christ. In some respects *opposition to the gospel is to be much deplored.* Under some aspects the withstanding of the message of mercy is a very grievous thing. Should the glad tidings be denied? Should the doctrine which God has given by express revelation be held up to scorn? Woe unto the men who dare thus to provoke their God! Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish! No man can set himself against God and against his Christ without frightful peril to his own soul. The greatest of men become base when they rebel against the light. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." Rivers of water should run down our eyes because

of the wicked who keep not God's law. Our hearts should be filled with horror at the blasphemy and presumption of those who set themselves with deliberate intent to oppose the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ; especially when they do it knowing something about it, and being half convinced of its truthfulness. The rejection of known truth is a crime which goes very near to the sin against the Holy Ghost, if it be not that sin. To oppose truth when it is seen to be truth, and to shut the eyes to light when it is admitted to be light, is a heinous offence against the God of truth, and he will certainly avenge it. Let us pity with all our hearts the men who oppose the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the more so because we believe that in some instances they know better, and are violating conscience by their opposition. If half the noise that has been made in this country against certain infidels for wishing to exercise the rights of English citizens had been spent in prayer for their conversion, it would have been a more profitable use of zeal, and would have been far more likely to bring down a blessing upon the nation. We are too apt to ban and curse antagonists, instead of pitying and praying for them. It is not yours and mine to shut the door in any man's face, however depraved he may be; but still to stand and entreat him to come to the Saviour, regarding even the judgments of God which fall upon him as meant to last only for a season, and intended to lead him to repentance: for this is the usual design of the chastenings of this life. Why should not the chief of sinners yet become a believer? Sometimes those who were the most opposed to Christ have been the first to yield, and have become the bravest champions of the faith. Saul of Tarsus himself, who was opposed by Elymas, had been a furious enemy of that gospel which now he earnestly proclaimed; and this fact must have sustained his courage under the sorcerer's attack. Saul did it ignorantly in unbelief, but there is reason to fear that this Elymas wilfully perverted the right ways of the Lord, and set himself deliberately with malice prepense to keep back an enquiring soul from the true faith. In such a case opposition to the faith is to be sadly deplored because of our pity for the enemy of truth, who is in this thing an enemy to his own soul.

But I further notice that *opposition is eminently overruled for good*, and therefore it would be unbecoming in us to lament it or dread it. We may not think so much of opposition as to yield to it so far as to cease our testimony, or tone it down, or omit a portion of it. The apostle Paul, when speaking of a place where he hoped for great success, said a great and effectual door was opened to him, and there were many adversaries (1 Cor. xvi. 9). It would seem that the second sentence was as good a sign of success as the first. Wherever there is likely to be great success, the open door and the opposing adversaries will both be found. If there are no adversaries, you may fear that there will be no success. A boy cannot get his kite up without wind, nor without a wind which drives *against* his kite. A contrary wind does much more for us than we suppose. Adversaries advertise the gospel, and so spread it. Opposing work, although in itself evil, is wondrously overruled by God for the best purposes; since persecution often arouses natural sympathy, and this becomes a ladder by which love climbs up into the heart. The devil is growing a little wiser than he used to be; but he still remains a

fool; for if he looked back over his own history, he would see that he has been the means of spreading the gospel by the attacks which he has made upon it. A little streamlet of living water flowed through Jerusalem, and wherever it went it fertilized the earth, and made it to bring forth and bud. It flowed on and became wider, and Satan said within himself, "If this continues I cannot tell what will come of it; I will, therefore, stop its flow." He looked around and found a great stone ready to his hand; I think it bore on it the name of Herod. This stone the arch-enemy dashed into the bed of the stream with intent to turn it aside. Great was the fall thereof, and in consequence of its force, the water of life splashed right and left, for they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Every drop of that streamlet became the mother of another fountain where it fell, and so other lands were refreshed with the waters of life. "Divide and conquer," said Satan: he divided, but he did not conquer. His raging winds carry far afield the precious seed of divine truth; every tempest that he raises speeds onward the barque of the church. Now, see! Saul of Tarsus desires to preach and tell Sergius Paul about the eternal truth, and Elymas must needs interpose. "What good could that be?" cries one. "How can that be overruled?" It was overruled: the Lord made the wrath of man to praise him, and brought to nothing the subtlety of Elymas.

In all probability the opposition of Bar-jesus may have called the attention of Sergius Paul more intently to the doctrine of the word of God. When a certain doctrine is neglected and half forgotten by the church of God there rises up a bold heretic who rails at the truth most bitterly, and then Christian people remember it, defend it, and propagate it. A Colenso attacks the story of the Exodus, and all eyes are fixed upon Moses, and the tribes of Israel. Some critic or other attacks the book of Deuteronomy, and straightway we get a host of books about Deuteronomy; all the scholars of the Christian church begin to study it, and as a part of the word it is valued exceedingly. This Elymas finds fault with the gospel, and Saul and Barnabas are thus called upon to clear up the points at issue, and by refuting the magician's malicious errors, they make the truth the more apparent to the mind of the proconsul. So far so good.

But this man's opposition was overruled further, for when Saul looked at him and pronounced upon him the solemn judgment of God, namely that he should be blind and should not see the sun for a season, then the proconsul saw what power attended the word of the Lord, and how truly it came forth from the Almighty. God by that solemn judgment set his seal to the truth and let all men know that it could not be reviled without the most solemn hazard to the opposer. Blinded Elymas seeking some to lead him by the hand was a visible witness for the truth against which he had fought. His sightless eyeballs were a just judgment from God. He had shut the eyes of his mind to the truth, and the Lord justly closed the eyes of his body; as he groped for the wall he was against his will a most convincing witness to the truth of the gospel, and of the divine commission of Barnabas and Saul. Depend upon it the Lord will yet baffle all opposers and he will establish his truth above all the traditions of men, his adversaries themselves being judges. Out

of their own mouths will he condemn his enemies. He will so confound and confuse unbelieving philosophers that their blindness shall bear evidence to the light of his word, which blinds the proud and self-sufficient. Men will again see how "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Manifestly even before the eyes of the unlearned it has happened, and will happen again that learned sceptics will give vent to sheer folly, and become the victims of childish credulity till men shake them off and say—"They are not the wise men we thought they were, and the old-fashioned gospel which they set themselves to overthrow is better than their vaunted discoveries." So may it be right speedily.

Moreover, this Elymas by his overthrow made the victory of Christ to be the more conspicuous. Here are Barnabas and Saul, two poor Jews, and they are met by one of their own countrymen who has obtained the ear of a ruler, by acting the part of a courtier and a doctor. He knew how to play his cards with the proconsul. How can these two men hope to destroy his influence, and establish the cross of Christ in its stead. If you had looked at them you would have said Elymas was master of the situation. He had a fulness of subtlety and no conscience to embarass his movements; he could use any cunning trick, while the missionaries could only keep to truth. He seemed sure of defeating the two simple-minded men; but as soon as Saul drew forth the sword of the Spirit, and told him plainly that though he might be called the son of Jesus he was the son of the devil, the victory was speedy and the vanquished sorcerer begged for help to make a retreat. Sergius Paul was one of the great ones of the earth, for those days comparable to a king, and when he believed, it was a noble gain to the cause. A chamberlain of the queen of Ethiopia had believed before him, but as not many great men, not many mighty are chosen, the conversion of the Proconsul of Cyprus was a great triumph for the gospel. It is noteworthy that from this point Saul of Tarsus is called Paul, and we read no more of Barnabas and Saul, but of Paul and Barnabas. If Saul had assumed the name of Paul from this memorable conversion it would not have been an unworthy act, for his joy at the winning of Sergius Paul might fitly have expressed itself in a fashion suggested by a common custom among Romans. As Scipeo after he conquered Africa was called Scipeo Africanus, so this man Saul after such a glorious winning of Sergius Paul for Christ might himself become Paul. It is very singular, but from this moment we do not find him called Saul except when he is telling the story of his conversion and necessarily uses his old name. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles henceforth calls him Paul; and that name must often have cheered the suffering apostle; when he was persecuted he would remember his own namesake, the Roman proconsul whom he had brought to the feet of Jesus, and he would see him standing in the front as a bright believer, while Elymas in the background utterly confounded, would serve as a dark figure to bring out the lights of the picture all the more clearly. Courage then, brothers and sisters, whenever you are trying to serve your Lord: if you are assailed, take heart and hope that a great victory is near. The Devil would let you alone if you were doing nothing of any consequence against his kingdom. If he could foresee your defeat, he has plenty to do, and therefore he would spend his strength elsewhere; but as he

fears you he assails you. If you were a mere official he would let you go on with your rigmarole; but since he sees you to be a living servant of the Lord he raises up an Elymas, with smooth and slippery tongue, to speak against you. Be bold and faint not, for you shall find even the most crafty and cruel enemy to be the unwilling agent of bringing greater glory to God. Be not afraid of a man that shall die, nor of the son of man which shall be made as grass. Go forward resting in the Lord, for greater is he who is for you than all they that are against you. With a brave heart defy all opposers, crying, "I will trust, and not be afraid." Never let us be discouraged, for the Lord is on our side. What can man do unto us?

This opposition must have been to Paul very instructive, for it was symbolic of the future. It seemed hard to teach this man, this Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, as touching the law a Pharisee, that he was sent to preach to the Gentiles, for even when he went to Cyprus he and Barnabas kept pretty much to Israel, preaching the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: but now he is to have an object lesson, which will show him his full career as in a living parable. Jew and Gentile are both before him. The Jew Elymas is opposing with the bitterest venom—true picture of his race. Sergius Paulus, the Gentile, listens with most prudent attention, candidly weighing everything, and at last he believes:—thus has it been with many of the Gentiles. The chosen of God among the Gentiles accept that which the Jews refuse. When Elymas was struck with blindness what a sorrowful picture he was of that blindness which has fallen upon Israel! "Blindness in part," saith Paul, "is happened to Israel," and so it happened unto Elymas: "Thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season." That word, "for a season," is a door of hope, for as the day came when Elymas could again behold the sun, so the day cometh when the blindness shall be taken from the heart of Israel, and the seed of Jacob shall look on him whom they have pierced. The scene before us is a tableau of the whole history of the Christian church in its relation to Jew and Gentile. Let us, therefore, look forward with the expectation that wherever the gospel triumphs it will meet with opposition, and wherever it is opposed it will win the victory.

II. We have done with the opposition; now let us consider certain AIDS TO FAITH. Sergius Paul, "when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." Kindly notice the words I have selected for a heading to this second part of my discourse—"aids to faith." I have not called miracles causes of faith, for they do not cause it, although they may lead up to it. What Sergius Paulus saw did not make him believe, but it helped him to believe. What did he see then? He saw what was done.

First, *he saw the great courage of Paul.* In another case boldness struck a blow at unbelief, for when the rulers saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned, and ignorant men, they marvelled. In this case the effect would be the same. That despised and persecuted Jew, Saul of Tarsus, fixed his eyes on Elymas as though he were perfectly master of the situation—as indeed he was—and without hesitation, or apology, addressed him, "O full of

all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" What made Paul bear himself so bravely? What had given courage to this otherwise retiring individual to come into the front and speak like a hero, as he was? Brethren, I believe the courage of the minister is often made a great blessing to undecided and trembling spirits; therefore when you go to teach and preach, never exhibit doubt or fear. The man who himself doubts may beget doubters, but he cannot be the father of believers. If thou hast any question about what thou hast to say, go home and wait till thou hast solved the problem. "I believed, therefore have I spoken," is the Psalmist's statement, and it is a wise one. Unbelief in a pulpit is like the rebellious angels in heaven; the sooner it is cast out the better. Intense conviction on the mind of Paul led him to speak thus plainly, sternly, and even indignantly; and we are sure that he did not err in so doing, since his warmth was not the heat of his own spirit, but the fire of the Spirit of God, for we read that he was filled with the Holy Ghost. Let every teacher of Christ be thus filled, and then let him speak boldly as he ought to speak. Come not forward with your "ifs" and "buts," and "peradventures," to prove that which is its own proof, and bears its own evidence upon its brow. Tell out the message God hath told thee, as from him, and not as thine own opinion. Deliver sound doctrine because thou hast been delivered into it thyself, as metal is poured into a mould. Speak because thou canst not be silent: speak because the Holy Ghost has stirred thee in thy privacy to unutterable groanings, and now moves thee to speak out thy soul before the sons of men.

It must have been an aid to Sergius Paul's faith to have seen the dauntless outspokenness of the greater Paul; but when he saw Elymas blinded, that gave a further impulse to him. *When God works in judgments among the sons of men many are astonished, and inclined to hear what this word may be which bears so solemn a seal from the God of judgment.* O sirs, I would to God that some of you who have seen men die in their sins would be warned by what you have seen. To many of us it has happened that we have seen the drunkard in his rags, perhaps in his delirium, possibly upon his death-bed. Some of us have seen the unchaste diseased in body, and despairing in soul; we have seen the profligate in poverty and dishonour; we have seen the sluggard hungry and houseless; and thus we have learned the result of sin upon other men if we have never felt it upon ourselves. He that will go to the hospital with his eyes open, or perhaps even call upon his next-door neighbour when his sins have come home to him, may see what sin can do even upon the outward fabric of our manhood. What it can do upon the soul can be guessed from the ruin which it brings upon the body. The blinded Elymas is not before us to-day; but we know that the narrative is true, and, therefore, without our actually seeing it, the lesson should come home to every thoughtful mind. We have probably seen with our own eyes instances in which other members of the human body have been rendered horrible with disease engendered by sin, and that ought to create in us a horror of all evil, and incline us to hear what the remedy of sin may be. He that has once seen the bane will long to know the antidote. He that has smarted under the curse of sin will be anxious

to learn the way by which the plague can be stayed, and men can be made anew in the image of God.

But if God's judgments and wonders are aids to faith, *what shall I say of his wonders of mercy?* Blessed be his name, these are much more common, and can be much more easily seen. I cannot show you to-day a man blinded because he refused the gospel; but I can show you a great many whose eyes have been opened by receiving the gospel. They did not believe it, nor wished to know anything about it; but they were persuaded to come and hear the word preached, and while they listened there fell from the eyes of their understanding as it had been scales, and they began to see. The glorious light which gleams from Jesus' brow was visible on a sudden: the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ came streaming into their once darkened minds, and they saw and believed. Hundreds of us who are now present were once as blind as bats to saving truth, but we have been brought out of darkness into marvellous light, and we gladly bear our testimony to the power of saving grace. I for one can say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see": what I could not understand is now clear to me; what I could not receive has now stamped itself upon my very being, to my heart's intense joy. I know, brothers and sisters, that thousands of you could rise if I were to ask you to testify that the Lord has renewed you in the spirit of your minds, and has brought you into spiritual life, light, and liberty. Glory be to God for it!

It ought to be a great help to enquiring minds when they see numerous conversions all around them, for conversions are the standing miracles of the gospel, and if any man will only look into them, and consider them awhile, he will perceive that they are the best attesting seals the truth can have. Evidently there is a singular power in the gospel which is not to be found anywhere else. What is this power? Whence comes it? Could it go with a falsehood? We have seen the gospel produce a singular revolution in a man—not a reformation merely, but a far deeper change, a new birth, a complete reconstruction of his nature; how was this done? I knew a man who was of a fierce temper, a troubler to his own household when he happened to fall into his fits; he was so passionate at times that I should not like to tell all the wild things which he would do. I have seen that man since conversion, and he has had things to test him which might, as we say, have provoked a saint, but he bore them patiently, and in a manner which I desire to imitate. The lion has become a lamb, he is gentle and tender; no one could think that he was the same man; indeed, he is not, for grace has made him a new man in Christ Jesus. We have seen persons revelling in licentiousness, who sinned greedily, who could not be satisfied with any common sin; but they have heard the gospel, and become chaste and even delicate in purity, so that the very mention of their former crimes has shocked them and made them weep. Such persons have manifested a watchful care against the fault in which they once delighted. They have been afraid to go near their old haunts, or to mix with their old companions. What has wrought this? What teaching must that be which accomplishes such marvels.

These changes have sometimes taken place in a brief space of time. Look at Colonel Gardiner, going to keep an assignation of the worst

sort, and as he waited for half-an-hour because he found himself too soon, he saw or thought he saw a vision of our Lord upon the cross, and, being reproved and melted by the sight, he fled from the spot, repented, believed, and lived a godly life. Until his death at the battle of Prestonpans, he was one of the leading Christians of his day. "That is an extraordinary instance," says one. I tell you I have met with scores equally remarkable. Not a week passes over my head but I hear of conversions which astound even me, used as I am to these miracles of love. The most unlikely people, those whom their friends never accused of a touch of Methodism, who never spoke of religion without a sneer, have heard the doctrine of our Lord Jesus, and before long they have repented of sin, have believed in the Redeemer, and have come to the front amongst earnest Christians, working for the Lord Jesus Christ with all their might. Thousands of others, who have been quietly pursuing the paths of morality and outward religion, have, nevertheless, experienced a spiritual change which to them has been quite as memorable as if they had been turned from the grossest immorality to virtue. These Lydias are as truly converted as if they had been Magdalens, and the change has been as real to themselves as if it had been conspicuous to all beholders.

What is this change? Is it fact or fancy? Do I see the sceptics smiling in a pretended pity for our folly? We are quite able to bear their contempt; will they be willing to hear a little reason? Sirs, do you think that we are all fools? In what are we inferior to those who thus despise us? Can we not manage our business affairs quite as well as those who think us fanatics? Are we all deceived? It is an odd thing that this deceit should lead hundreds of thousands in all ages to seek after virtue and true holiness, and to seek peace, and live for the good of others. This singular phenomenon of regeneration is not to be denied, for its witnesses are countless. I claim that we have a right to be heard even by those gentlemen who believe only in actual phenomena. This is not to be put aside by a wave of the hand and a sneer; all attempts in that direction are as unphilosophical as they are insulting. We depone to certain operations which we have seen in others and felt in ourselves, by which the current of our thought is changed, our loves and hates have been made entirely different, and our whole manhood has been made anew. These operations we believe to be wrought by the finger of God, and to be proofs that the gospel is supernatural and true. I do not say that this witness will lead any man to saving faith by itself; but I do say that were not men's minds depraved, it would do so. I say it ought, at any rate, to lead every man to give attention to that gospel whose operation is so remarkable. A sceptical barrister in America took it into his head to attend a Wesleyan class-meeting; and he sat down apart from the rest merely to take notes of what was said, as he might have done in a court of law. He knew the persons who spoke one after the other, and bore testimony to the effect of the gospel upon them. They were his neighbours; and he thought to himself, "If I were arguing a case, and could put these people into the witness-box, and they were on my side, I should feel quite sure of carrying my case; for they are well known for honesty and truthfulness." Several persons, without any collusion, rose one after another, and

though their stories greatly varied, yet they all came to one point—that they had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Ghost had been made totally new. As the lawyer went out he said to himself, "Their case is proved; I cannot question the truthfulness of any of these witnesses. There must be much more in religion than I thought." This led him to seek the Saviour for himself, and he became a Christian. I pray that many here present may feel that these wonders of mercy are a great aid to them, and may the Holy Spirit lead them to attend to the gospel which has such power in it! Here I wish we could stop and sing that admirable hymn:

"Questions and doubts be heard no more,
Let Christ and joy be all our theme;
His Spirit seals his gospel sure
To every soul that trusts in him.

"'Tis God's inimitable hand
That moulds and forms the heart anew;
Blasphemers can no more withstand,
But bow, and own thy doctrine true.

"The guilty soul, that trusts thy blood,
Finds peace and pardon at the cross;
The sinful soul, averse from God,
Believes and loves his Maker's laws.

"Learning and wit may cease their strife,
When miracles with glory shine;
The voice that calls the dead to life
Must be almighty and divine."

III. But I must proceed. Lastly, let us observe THE SOURCE OF FAITH. "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." *It is doctrine, then, or faithful teaching, which brings men to Christ.* Let those who despise doctrine mind what they are doing, for the doctrine of the cross is only foolishness to them who perish. Under the influence of the Holy Ghost, the plain teaching of the word of the Lord leads men to believe in Jesus. I do not think it is any great good for a preacher to stand up and cry, "Believe, believe, believe," if he never tells you what is to be believed. There is plenty of this kind of preaching about, and the result is sadly transient and superficial. Poor souls say, "We are ready to believe, but tell us what to believe; we are ready to trust, but tell us what to trust in." If we do not preach the great doctrine of the atoning sacrifice, if we do not lift up Christ as suffering chastisement in man's place and stead, we have not put before them the basis on which their faith is to be built. Justification by faith and regeneration by the Spirit must be taught continually. The proconsul was no doubt astonished to see Elymas blinded, but he was a great deal more astonished at the doctrine which Paul preached when he began to tell him that salvation was not by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ; that the way to be accepted of God was not by presenting to the Lord anything performed by us or felt within us, but by laying hold upon the righteousness which Jesus Christ has wrought out and brought in. When he heard this good news, he might well be astonished, and yield his heart to

Jesus. Dear friends, the most astonishing thing in the world is the gospel. "We have heard it for a long time," says one. Have you? You may have listened to it for years, but all the while it may have gone in and out of your ears, and still you may never have *heard* it. But if you have heard it inwardly, and understood it, you will own that it is the miracle of miracles, the masterpiece of divine wisdom. Listen! In the gospel God is just and yet merciful: he lays upon his Son the chastisement of our peace, and then he forgives us freely for his own name's sake. In the gospel everything is of grace: there is no respect to human merit or human virtue, but God gives freely to undeserving sinners; and yet there is nothing like the gospel for fostering holiness and making men zealous for good works. It will not allow good works to be the root of spiritual life, but it promotes. nay, creates good works as the fruit of that life. All the really good works in the world are fashioned upon the anvil of free grace. Nothing ever produces holiness but faith in the holy Saviour, and it is as wonderful as it is true, that while the gospel bids the sinner come to Jesus as freely as if he were not guilty, yet it declares that without holiness no man can see the Lord. It does not merely command holiness, but it produces it. It is a wonderful system for clearing the guilty, and yet for condemning his sin. It is the glory of the gospel that it can at one blow save the sinner and slay his sin, absolve the rebel and end his rebellion. This supernatural effect is not produced for a short time only, but for ever. The gospel does not renew a sinner for a season, and then leave him to relapse; but it gives an endless life, implants a deathless principle, and secures ultimate perfection. It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." "He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life," —not a life that comes and goes, but a life that endures to all eternity. All this can be done in a minute, so that a heavenly life commences in less time than it takes yon clock to tick—is not this an astonishing work of the Holy Ghost? As Sergius Paul heard of this he was amazed, and believed: do you wonder?

I say to you who do not understand the gospel, if you want a refreshing sensation, if you go in for novelty, and desire something off the common, begin to study the word of God, and to hear it without prejudice. Here is a doctrine which is always news, always glad tidings. Hear and your soul shall live. Turn from it and you will perish. Angels have not yet grown weary of gazing into the depths of the gospel. It is written, "which things the angels desire to look into." Two figures of cherubim were placed over the mercy-seat of old, standing with outstretched wings, and gazing down upon the lid of the ark of the covenant, which was called the mercy-seat. This was meant to set forth the desire of holy angels to comprehend the gospel of propitiation. They cannot get a full understanding of all its mysteries till you and I shall join them before the throne, and there declare what grace has done for us, "to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."

Come then, my hearers, come and candidly study what is to be believed. Come and be astonished at the doctrine of Christ crucified! Incline your ears, arouse your minds, and yield your hearts; be eager to be instructed of the Holy Ghost, who waits to teach you. If you are

willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land. If you desire to know God you shall know him. The great Father is not far from any one of you. There is the light! It is not dim, nor far away. The fault is in your eyes if you do not see. Oh, that you would cry out with Bartimeus, "Son of David, have mercy on me." Oh, that your prayer would be, "Lord, that I might receive my sight." Then you would see and believe, and live for ever. God grant it this very morning, to the praise of the glory of his grace. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts xiii. 1—43.

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TOKEN FOR THE BEREAVED.
LET US PRAY.
CALL TO THE UNCONVERTED.
SERMON FOR EVERYBODY.
HOW TO OBTAIN FAITH.
IS CONVERSION NECESSARY?
THE TURNING POINT.
A SPUR FOR A FREE HORSE.
BELLS FOR THE HORSES.
THE WAR HORSE.
GOD'S JEWELS.
BAPTISMAL REGENERATION.
CONFESSION OF SIN.
APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION.
THE WAY OF SALVATION.
INFANT SALVATION.
HOW TO RAISE THE DEAD.
NONE BUT JESUS.
THE ESSENCE OF SIMPLICITY.
THE SILVER TRUMPET.
JESUS AND THE LAMBS.
A WORD FOR THE PERSECUTED.
THE PRIEST DISPENSED WITH.
BEST BURDEN FOR YOUNG SHOULDERS.
"SUPPOSING HIM TO BE THE GARDENER."
LOVING ADVICE for ANXIOUS SEEKERS.
THE UPPER HAND.
A GOOD SOLDIER OF JESUS CHRIST.
LANDLORD AND TENANT
A DOUBLE KNOCK AT THE DOOR OF THE YOUNG.
THERE GO THE SHIPS.
LITTLE DOGS.
THE SILLY DOVE.
THE HOLD FAST.
RECEIVING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A LITTLE CHILD.
AN ANXIOUS ENQUIRY FOR A BELOVED SON.
NUMBER 1500, OR LIFTING UP THE BRAZEN SERPENT.
THE PEARL OF PATIENCE.
FEAR NOT.
THE SEA! THE SEA! THE WIDE AND OPEN SEA!
FAITH: WHAT IS IT? HOW CAN IT BE OBTAINED?
ONLY TRUST HIM! ONLY TRUST HIM!
IS IT NOTHING TO YOU?
THE EXETER-HALL SERMON TO YOUNG MEN.
A LUTHER SERMON AT THE TABERNACLE.
THE LUTHER SERMON AT EXETER-HALL.
THE ANXIOUS INQUIRER.
HIGH DOCTRINE AND BROAD DOCTRINE.

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THE FIRST FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 25TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love."—Galatians v. 22.

THE worst enemy we have is the flesh. Augustine used frequently to pray, "Lord, deliver me from that evil man, myself." All the fire which the devil can bring from hell could do us little harm if we had not so much fuel in our nature. It is the powder in the magazine of the old man which is our perpetual danger. When we are guarding against foes without, we must not forget to be continually on our watch-tower against the foe of foes within. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." On the other hand, our best friend, who loves us better than we love ourselves, is the Holy Spirit. We are shockingly forgetful of the Holy Ghost, and therein it is to be feared that we greatly grieve him; yet we are immeasurably indebted to him: in fact, we owe our spiritual existence to his divine power. It would not be proper to compare the love of the Spirit with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, so as even by implication to set up a scale of degrees in love; for the love of the regenerating Spirit is infinite, even as is the love of the redeeming Son. But yet for a moment we will set these two displays of love side by side. Is not the indwelling of the Spirit of God equal in loving-kindness to the incarnation of the Son of God? Jesus dwelt in a pure manhood of his own; the Holy Spirit dwells in our manhood, which is fallen, and as yet imperfectly sanctified. Jesus dwelt in his human body, having it perfectly under his own control; but, alas, the Holy Spirit must contend for the mastery within us, and though he is Lord over our hearts, yet there is an evil power within our members, strongly intrenched and obstinately bent on mischief. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." Our Lord Jesus dwelt in his body only for some thirty years or so; but the blessed Spirit of all grace dwelleth in us evermore, through all the days of our pilgrimage: from the moment when he enters into us by regeneration he continueth in us, making us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. You sing

"Oh, 'tis love, 'tis wondrous love,"

in reference to our Lord Jesus and his cross: sing it also in reference to the Holy Spirit and his long-suffering. He looks at us from within, and therefore he sees the chambers of imagery where hidden idols still abide. He sees our actions; not from without, for therein, perhaps, they might be judged favourably; but he discerns them from within, in their springs and in the pollution of those springs; in their main currents and in all their side eddies and back waters. O brethren, it is wonderful that this blessed Spirit should not leave us in indignation; we lodge him so ill, we honour him so little. He receives so little of our affectionate worship that he might well say, "I will no longer abide with you." When the Lord had given up his people to the Roman sword, there was heard in the temple at Jerusalem a sound as of rushing wings, and a voice crying, "Let us go hence." Justly might the divine presence have left us also because of our sins. It is matchless love which has caused the Holy Spirit to bear with our ill manners, and bear our vexatious behaviour. He stays though sin intrudes into his temple! He makes his royal abode where evil assails his palace! Alas, that a heart where the Spirit deigns to dwell should ever be made a thoroughfare for selfish or unbelieving traffic! God help us to adore the Holy Ghost at the commencement of our discourse, and to do so even more reverently at its close!

The Holy Ghost when he comes into us is the author of all our desires after true holiness. He strives in us against the flesh. That holy conflict which we wage against our corruption cometh entirely of him. We should sit down in willing bondage to the flesh, if he did not bid us strike for liberty. The good Spirit also leads us in the way of life. If we be led of the Spirit, says the apostle, we are not under the law. He leadeth us by gentle means, drawing us with cords of love, and bands of a man. "He leadeth me." If we take a single step in the right road, it is because he leadeth us, and if we have persevered these many years in the way of peace, it is all due to his guidance, even to him who will surely bring us in and make us to enjoy the promised rest.

> "And every virtue we possess,
> And every victory won,
> And every thought of holiness,
> Are his alone."

The Holy Ghost not only creates the inward contest against sin, and the agonizing desire for holiness, and leads us onward in the way of life, but he remains within us, taking up his residence, and somewhat more: for the text suggests a still more immovable steadfastness of residence in our hearts, since according to the figure, the Spirit strikes root within us. The text speaks of "fruit," and fruit cometh only of a rooted abidance; it could not be conceived of in connection with a transient sojourning, like that of a wayfaring man. The stakes and tent pins that are driven into the ground for an Arab's tent bear no fruit, for they do not remain in one stay; and inasmuch as I read of the "fruit of the Spirit," I take comfort from the hint, and conclude that he intends to abide in our souls as a tree abides in the soil when fruit is borne by it. Let us love and bless the Holy Ghost! Let the golden altar of incense perfume this earth with the sweet savour of perpetual

adoration to the Holy Ghost! Let our hearts heartily sing to him this solemn doxology:—

"We give thee, sacred Spirit, praise,
Who in our hearts of sin and woe
Makes living springs of grace arise,
And into boundless glory flow."

I. Now, coming to our text, I shall notice the matters contained in it, and the first thing which my mind perceives is A WINNOWING FAN. I would like to be able to use it, but it is better far that it should remain where it is, for "the fan is in *his* hand, and *he* will thoroughly purge his floor." The handle of this winnowing fan is made of the first word of the text, that disjunctive conjunction, that dividing monosyllable, "*But.*" "*But* the fruit of the Spirit is love"!

That "but" is placed there because the apostle had been mentioning certain works of the flesh, all of which he winnows away like chaff, and then sets forth in opposition to them "the fruit of the Spirit." If you will read the chapter, you will notice that the apostle has used no less than seventeen words, I might almost say eighteen, to describe the works of the flesh. Human language is always rich in bad words, because the human heart is full of the manifold evils which these words denote. Nine words are here used to express the fruit of the Spirit; but to express the works of the flesh,—see how many are gathered together!

The first set of these works of the flesh which have to be winnowed away are *the counterfeits of love to man.* Counterfeited love is one of the vilest things under heaven. That heavenly word, *love*, has been trailed in the mire of unclean passion and filthy desire. The licentiousness, which comes of the worship of Venus, has dared to take to itself a name which belongs only to the pure worship of Jehovah. Now, the works which counterfeit love are these: "*adultery*, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness." To talk of "love" when a man covets his neighbour's wife, or when a woman violates the command, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," is little less than sheer blasphemy against the holiness of love. It is not love, but lust; love is an angel, and lust a devil. The purities of domestic life are defiled, and its honours are disgraced when once the marriage bond is disregarded. When men or women talk of religion, and are unfaithful to their marriage covenant, they are base hypocrites. Even the heathen condemned this infamy, let not Christians tolerate it. The next fleshly work is "*fornication*," which was scarcely censured among the heathen, but is most sternly condemned by Christianity. It is a wretched sign of the times that in these corrupt days some have arisen who treat this crime as a slight offence, and even attempt to provide for its safer indulgence by legislative enactments. Has it come to this? Has the civil ruler become a panderer to the lusts of corrupt minds? Let it not be once named among you, as it becometh saints. "*Uncleanness*" is a third work of the flesh, and it includes those many forms of foul offence which defile the body and deprive it of its true honour; while to bring up the rear we have "*lasciviousness*," which is the cord which draws on uncleanness, and includes all conversation which excites the passions, all songs which suggest lewdness, all gestures and thoughts which lead up to unlawful gratification. We have sadly much of these two evils in these days, not only openly in our

streets, but in more secret ways. I loathe the subject. All works of art which are contrary to modesty are here condemned, and the most pleasing poetry if it creates impure imaginations. These unclean things are the works of the flesh in the stage of putridity—the very maggots which swarm within a corrupt soul. Bury these rotten things out of our sight! I do but uncover them for an instant that a holy disgust may be caused in every Christian soul; and that we may flee therefrom as from the breath of pestilence. Yet remember, O you that think yourselves pure, and imagine you would never transgress so badly, that even into these loathsome and abominable criminalities high professors have fallen; ay, and sincere believers trusting in themselves have slipped into this ditch, from whence they have escaped with infinite sorrow, to go with broken bones the rest of their pilgrimage. Alas, how many who seemed to be clean escaped from pollution have so fallen that they have had to be saved so as by fire! Oh, may we keep our garments unspotted by the flesh; and this we cannot do unless it be in the power and energy of the Spirit of holiness. He must purge these evils from us, and cause his fruit so to abound in us that the deeds of the flesh shall be excluded for ever.

The winnowing fan is used next against the *counterfeits of love to God;* I refer to the falsities of superstition—"Idolatry and witchcraft"—"but the fruit of the Spirit is love." Alas, there are some that fall into *idolatry;* for they trust in an arm of flesh, and exalt the creature into the place of the Creator; "their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame." The golden calf of wealth, the silver shrines of craft, the goddess of philosophy, the Diana of fashion, the Moloch of power, these are all worshipped instead of the living God. Those who profess to reverence the true God, yet too generally worship him in ways which he has not ordained. Thus saith the Lord, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." Yet we have Christians (so called) who say they derive help in the exercise of devotion from images and pictures. See how their places of assembly are rendered gaudy with pictures, and images, and things which savour of old Rome. What idolatry is openly carried on in certain buildings belonging to the National Church! What sensuous worship is now approved? Men cannot worship God nowadays unless their eyes, and ears, and noses are gratified: when these senses of the flesh are pleased, they are satisfied with themselves; "but the fruit of the Spirit is love." Love is the most perfect architecture, for "love buildeth up;" love is the sweetest music, for without it we are become as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal; love is the choicest incense, for it is a sacrifice of sweet smell; love is the fittest vestment,—"Above all things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." Oh, that men would remember that the fruit of the Spirit is not the finery of the florist, the sculptor, or the milliner, but the love of the heart. It ill-becomes us to make that gaudy which should be simple and spiritual. The fruit of the Spirit is not idolatry,—the worship of another god, or of the true God after the manner of will-worship. No, that fruit is obedient love to the only living God.

"*Witchcraft*," too, is a work of the flesh. Under this head we may rightly group all that prying into the unseen, that rending of the veil which God has hung up, that interfering with departed spirits, that necromancy which calls itself spiritualism, and pays court to familiar spirits and demons—this is no fruit of the Spirit, but the fruit of a bitter root. Brother Christians, modern witchcrafts and wizardry are to be abhorred and condemned, and you will be wise to keep clear of them, trembling to be found acting in concert with those who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. Idolatry and witchcraft are caused by a want of love to God, and they are evidences that the Spirit's life is not in the soul. When you come to love God with all your heart, you will not worship God in ways of your own devising, but you will ask, "Wherewithal shall I draw near unto the most high God?" and you will take your direction from the Lord's inspired word. The service which he prescribes is the only service which he will accept. The winnowing fan is at work now: I wonder whether it is operating upon any here present?

But next, this great winnowing-fan drives away with its "*but*" all *the forms of hate*. The apostle mentions "*hatred*," or an habitual enmity to men, usually combined with a selfish esteem of one's own person. Certain men cherish a dislike to everybody who is not of their clique, while they detest those who oppose them. They are contemptuous, to the weak ready to take offence, and little careful whether they give it or no. They delight to be in minorities of one, and the more wrongheaded and pugnacious they can be, the more are they in their element. "*Variance*," too, with its perpetual dislikes, bickerings, and quarrellings, is a work of the flesh. Those who indulge in it are contrary to all men, pushing their angles into everybody's eyes, and looking out for occasions of fault-finding, and strife. "*Emulations*,"—that is, jealousy. Jealousy in all its forms is one of the works of the flesh: is it not cruel as the grave? There is a jealousy which sickens if another be praised, and pines away if another prospers. It is a venomous thing, and stingeth like an adder: it is a serpent by the way, biting the horse's heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. "*Wrath*" is another deed of the flesh: I mean the fury of angry passion, and all the madness which comes of it. "But I am a man of very quick temper," says one. Are you a Christian? If so, you are bound to master this evil force, or it will ruin you. If you were a saint of God to the very highest degree in all but in this one point, it would pull you down; ay, at any moment an angry spirit might make you say and do that which would cause you life-long sorrow. "*Strife*" is a somewhat milder, but equally mischievous, form of the same evil; if it burns not quite so fast and furiously, yet it is a slow fire kindled by the self-same flame of hell as the more ardent passion. The continual love of contention, the morbid sensitiveness, the overweening regard to one's own dignity, which join together to produce strife, are all evil things. What is the proper respect which is due to poor creatures like ourselves? I ween that if any one of us did get our "proper respect," we should not like it long: we should think that bare justice was rather scant in its appreciation. We desire to be flattered when we cry out for "proper respect." Respect, indeed! Why if we had our desert, we should be in the lowest hell! Then our

apostle mentions "*seditions*," which occur in the state, the church, and the family. As far as our church life is concerned, this evil shows itself in an opposition to all sorts of authority or law. Any kind of official action in the church is to be railed at because it is official; rule of any sort is objected to because each man desires to have the pre-eminence, and will not be second. God save us from this evil leaven! *Heresy* is that kind of hate which makes every man set up to create his own religion, write his own Bible, and think out his own gospel. We have heard of "Every man his own lawyer," and now we are coming to have "Every man his own God, every man his own Bible, every man his own instructor." After this work of the flesh, come "*Envyings;*" not so much the desire to enrich one's self at another's expense, as a wolfish craving to impoverish him, and pull him down for the mere sake of it. This is a very acrid form of undiluted hate, and leaves but one stronger form of hate. To desire another's dishonour merely from envy of his superiority is simply devilish, and is a sort of murder of the man's best life. The list is fitly closed by "*murders*," a suitable corner-stone to crown this diabolical edifice; for what is hate but murder? And what is murder but hate bearing its full fruit? He who does not love has within him all the elements that make a murderer. If you have not a general feeling of benevolence towards all men, and a desire to do them good, the old spirit of Cain is within you, and it only needs to be unrestrained and it will strike the fatal blow, and lay your brother dead at your feet. God save you, men and brethren, every one of you, from the domination of these dark principles of hate, which are the works of the flesh in its corruption. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love."

Next time you begin to boil over with wrath, think you feel a hand touching you and causing you to hear a gentle voice whispering, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love." Next time you say, "I will never speak to that man again, I cannot endure him," think you feel a fresh wind fanning your fevered brow, and hear the angel of mercy say, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love." Next time you are inclined to find fault with everybody, and set your brethren by the ears, and create a general scuffle, I pray you let the chimes ring out, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love." If you wish to find fault, it is easy to do so; you may begin with me and go down to the last young member that was admitted into the church, and you will not have to look long before you can spy out something which needs improvement; but to what end will you pick holes in our coats? Whenever you are bent on the growling business, pause awhile and hear the Scripture admonish you, "The fruit of the Spirit is love." When you wax indignant because you have been badly treated, and you think of returning evil for evil, remember this text, "The fruit of the Spirit is love." "Ah," you say, "it was shameful!" Of course it was: and therefore do not imitate it: do not render railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing, for "the fruit of the Spirit is love."

The winnowing-fan is at work: God blow your chaff away, brethren, and mine too!

The next thing which the winnowing-fan blows away is *the excess of self-indulgence*—"drunkenness, revellings, and such like." Alas, that Christian people should ever need to be warned against these animal offences, and yet they do need it. The wine-cup still has its charms for

professors. Nor is this all: it is not merely that you may drink to excess, but you may eat to excess, or clothe your body too sumptuously, or there may be some other spending of money upon your own gratification which is not according to sober living. Drunkenness is one of those trespasses of which Paul says "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The revelling which makes night hideous with its songs so called,—call them howlings and you are nearer the mark,—the revelling which spends hour after hour in entertainments which heat the blood, and harden the heart, and chase away all solid thought, is not for us who have renounced the works of darkness: for us there is a better joy, namely, to be filled with the Spirit, and "the fruit of the Spirit is love."

II. The second thing which I see in the text is A JEWEL,—that jewel is *love*. "The fruit of the Spirit is love." What a priceless Kohinoor this is! It is altogether incalculable in value. What a heavenly grace love is! It has its centre in the heart, but its circumference sweeps, like omnipresence, around everything. Love is a grace of boundless scope. We love God: it is the only way in which we can embrace him fully. We can love the whole of God, but we cannot know the whole of God. Yes, we love God, and even love that part of God which we cannot comprehend or even know. We love the Father as he is. We love his dear Son as he is. We love the ever-blessed Spirit as he is. Following upon this, for God's sake we love the creatures he has made. It is true in a measure that

> "He prayeth best that loveth best
> Both man and bird and beast."

Every tiny fly that God has made is sacred to our souls as God's creature. Our love climbs to heaven, sits among the angels, and anon bows among them in lowliest attitude; but in due time our love stoops down to earth, visits the haunts of depravity, cheers the garrets of poverty, and sanctifies the dens of blasphemy, for it loves the lost. Love knows no outcast London, it has cast out none. It talks not of the "lapsed masses," for none have lapsed from its regard. Love hopes good for all, and plans good for all: while it can soar to glory it can descend to sorrow.

Love is a grace which has to do with eternity; for we shall never cease to love him who first loved us. But love has also to do with this present world, for it is at home in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, nursing the sick, and liberating the slave. Love delights in visiting the fatherless and the widows, and thus it earns the encomium,—"I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Love is a very practical, home-spun virtue, and yet it is so rich and rare that God alone is its author. None but a heavenly power can produce this fine linen; the love of the world is sorry stuff.

Love has to do with friends. How fondly it nestles in the parental bosom! How sweetly it smiles from a mother's eye! How closely it binds two souls together in marriage bonds! How pleasantly it walks along the ways of life, leaning on the arm of friendship! But love is not content with this, she embraces her enemy, she heaps coals of fire

upon her adversary's head: she prays for them that despitefully use her and persecute her. Is not this a precious jewel indeed? What earthly thing can be compared to it?

You must have noticed that *in the list of the fruits of the Spirit it is the first*—"The fruit of the Spirit is love." It is first because in some respects it is best. First, because it leads the way. First, because it becomes the motive principle and stimulant of every other grace and virtue. You cannot conceive of anything more forceful and more beneficial, and therefore it is the first. But *see what followeth at its heel.* Two shining ones attend it like maids of honour, waiting upon a queen. "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace": he that hath love hath joy and peace. What choice companions! To love much is to possess a deep delight, a secret cellar of the wine of joy which no man else may taste. He that loveth is like to God, who is the God of peace. Truly the meek and loving shall inherit the earth, and delight themselves in the abundance of peace. He is calm and quiet whose soul is full of love; in his boat the Lord stands at the helm, saying to the winds and waves, "Peace; be still!" He that is all love, though he may have to suffer, yet shall count it all joy when he falleth into divers trials. See then what a precious jewel it is that hath so many shining brilliants set at its side.

Love has this for its excellence, that it fulfils the whole law: you cannot say that of any other virtue. Yet, while it fulfils the whole law, it is not legal. Nobody ever loved because it was demanded of him; a good man loves because it is his nature to do so. Love is free—it bloweth where it listeth, like the Spirit from which it comes. Love, indeed, is the very essence of heart liberty. Well may it be honoured; for while it is a true grace of the gospel, it nevertheless fulfils the whole law. If you would have law and gospel sweetly combined, you have it in the fruit of the Spirit, which is love.

Love, moreover, is Godlike, for God is love. Love it is which prepares us for heaven, where everything is love. Come, sweet Spirit, and rest upon us till our nature is transformed into the divine nature by our becoming burning flames of love. Oh, that it were so with us this very day!

Mark, beloved, that the love we are speaking of is not a love which cometh out of men on account of their natural constitution. I have known persons who are tenderly affectionate by nature; and this is good; but it is not spiritual love: it is the fruit of nature and not of grace. An affectionate disposition is admirable, and yet it may become a danger, by leading to inordinate affection, a timid fear of offending, or an idolatry of the creature. I do not condemn natural amiability; on the contrary, I wish that all men were naturally amiable: but I would not have any person think that this will save him, or that it is a proof that he is renewed. Only the love which is the fruit of the Spirit may be regarded as a mark of grace. Some people, I am sorry to say, are naturally sour; they seem to have been born at the season of crab-apples, and to have been fed on vinegar. They always take a fault-finding view of things. They never see the sun's splendour, and yet they are so clear-sighted as to have discovered his spots. They have a great speciality of power for discerning things which it were better not

to see. They do not remember that the earth has proved steady and firm for centuries, but they have a lively recollection of the earthquake, and they quake even now as they talk about it. Such people as these have need to cry for the indwelling of the Spirit of God, for if he will enter into them his power will soon overcome the tendency to sourness, for "the fruit of the Spirit is love." Spiritual love is nowhere found without the Spirit, and the Spirit is nowhere dwelling in the heart unless love is produced. So much for this jewel!

III. I see in the text a third thing, and that is A PICTURE: a rich and rare picture painted by a Master, the great designer of all things beautiful, the divine Spirit of God. What doth he say? He saith, "The fruit of the Spirit is love." We have seen many fine fruit pictures; and here is one. The great artist has sketched fruit which never grows in the gardens of earth till they are planted by the Lord from heaven. Oh, that every one of us might have a vineyard in his bosom, and yield abundance of that love which is "the fruit of the Spirit."

What does this mean? "Fruit," how is love a fruit? The metaphor shows that love is a thing which comes out of life. You cannot fetch fruit out of a dead post. The pillars which support these galleries have never yielded any fruit, and they never will; they are of hard iron, and no life-sap circulates within them. A dead tree bringeth forth no fruit. God implants a spiritual life in men, and then out of that life comes love, as the fruit of the Spirit.

Love appears as a growth. Fruit does not start from the tree perfectly ripe at once: first comes a flower; then a tiny formation which shows that the flower has set; then a berry appears, but it is very sour. You may not gather it. Let it alone a little while, and allow the sun to ripen it. By-and-by it fills out, and there you have the apple in the full proportions of beauty, and with a mellow flavour which delights the taste. Love springs up in the heart, and increases by a sure growth. Love is not produced by casting the mind in the mould of imitation, or by fastening the grace to a man's manner as a thing outside of himself. Little children go to a shop where their little tastes are considered, and they buy sticks upon which cherries have been tied; but everybody knows that they are not the fruit of the sticks, they are merely bound upon them. And so have we known people who have borrowed an affectionate mannerism and a sweet style; but they are not natural to them: they are not true love. What sweet words! What dainty phrases! You go among them and at first you are surprised with their affection, you are a "*dear* sister" or a "*dear* brother," and you hear a "*dear* minister," and you come to the "*dear* Tabernacle," and sing *dear* hymns to those *dear* old tunes. Their talk is so sweet that it is just a little sticky, and you feel like a fly which is being caught in molasses. This is disgusting; it sickens one. Love is a fruit of the Spirit, it is not something assumed by a man, but something growing out of his heart. Some men sugar their conversation very largely with pretentious words because they are aware that the fruit it is made of is unripe and sour. In such a case their sweetness is not affection but affectation. But true love, real love for God and man, comes out of a man because it is in him, wrought within by the operation of the Holy

Ghost, whose fruit it is. The outcome of regenerated manhood is that a man lives no longer unto himself but for the good of others.

Fruit again calls for care. If you have a garden you will soon know this. We had a profusion of flowers upon our pear trees this year, and for a few weeks the weather was warm beyond the usual heat of April, but nights of frost followed and cut off nearly all the fruit. Other kinds of fruit which survived the frost are now in danger from the dry weather which has developed an endless variety of insect blight, so that we wonder whether any of it will survive. If we get over this trial and the fruit grows well we shall yet expect to see many apples fall before autumn, because a worm has eaten into their hearts and effectually destroyed them. So is it with Christian life: I have seen a work for the Lord prospering splendidly, like a fruitful vine, when suddenly there has come a frosty night and fond hopes have been nipped: or else new notions, and wild ideas have descended like insect blights and the fruit has been spoiled; or if the work has escaped these causes of damage, some immorality in a leading member, or a quarrelsome spirit, has appeared unawares like a worm in the centre of the apple, and down it has fallen never to flourish again. "The fruit of the Spirit is love." You must take care of your fruit if you wish to have any laid up in store at the end of the year; and so must every Christian be very watchful over the fruit of the Spirit, lest in any way it should be destroyed by the enemy.

Fruit is the reward of the husbandman and the crown and glory of the tree. The Lord crowns the year with his goodness by giving fruit in due season: and truly the holy fruit of love is the reward of Jesus and the honour of his servants.

How sweet is the fruit of the Spirit! I say "fruit" and not fruits, for the text says so. The work of the Spirit is one, whether it be known by the name of love, or joy, or peace, or meekness, or gentleness, or temperance. Moreover, it is constant; the fruit of the Spirit is borne continually in its season. It is reproductive, for the tree multiplies itself by its fruit; and Christianity must be spread by the love and joy and peace of Christians. Let the Spirit of God work in you, dear brethren, and you will be fruitful in every good work, doing the will of the Lord, and you will rear others like you, who shall, when your time is over, occupy your place, and bring forth fruit to the great Husbandman.

IV. Lastly, you see in my text A CROWN. "The fruit of the Spirit is love." Let us make a diadem out of the text, and lovingly set it upon the head of the Holy Spirit, because he has produced in the people of God this precious thing which is called "Love."

How comes heavenly love into such hearts as yours and mine? It comes, first, because the Holy Ghost has given us a new nature. There is a new life in us that was not there when we first came into the world, and that new life lives and loves. It must love God who has created it, and man who is made in his image. It cries, "My Father," and the essence of that word, "My Father," is love.

The Spirit of God has brought us into new relationships. He has given us the spirit of adoption towards the Father; he has made us to feel our brotherhood with the saints, and to know our union with Christ. We are not in our relationships what we used to be, for we were "heirs

of wrath even as others"; but now we are "heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ"; and consequently we cannot help loving, for love alone could make the new relation to be fully enjoyed.

The blessed Spirit has also brought us under new obligations. We were bound to love God and serve him as creatures, but we did not do it: now the Holy Spirit has made us to feel that we are debtors to infinite love and mercy through redemption. Every drop of Jesus' blood cries to us to love; every groan from yonder dark Gethsemane cries love. The Spirit of God works in us, so that every shiver of yonder cross moves us to love. The love of Christ constraineth us: we must love, for the Spirit hath taken of the things of the loving Christ and hath revealed them unto us.

The Spirit of God has so entered into us that he has caused love to be our delight. What a pleasure it is when you can preach a sermon full of love to those to whom you preach it, or when you can visit the poor, full of love to those you relieve! To stand in the street corner and tell out of Jesus' dying love—why, it is no irksome task to the man who does it lovingly; it is his joy, and his recreation. Holy service in which the emotion of love is indulged is as pleasant to us as it is to a bird to fly, or to a fish to swim. Duty is no longer bondage, but choice; holiness is no longer restraint, but perfect liberty; and self-sacrifice becomes the very crown of our ambition, the loftiest height to which our spirit can aspire. It is the Holy Ghost that does all this.

Now, my dear hearer, have you this love in your heart? Judge by your relation to God. Do you live without prayer? Do you very seldom read God's word? Are you getting indifferent as to whether you go and worship with his people? Ah, then, be afraid that the love of God is not in you. But if you feel that everything that has to do with God you love—his work, his service, his people, his day, his book—and that you do all that in you lies to spread his kingdom, both by prayer, by word of mouth, by your liberality, and by your example; if you do love you can easily see it, I think, and there are many ways by which you can test yourself.

Well, suppose that to be satisfactorily answered, then I have this further question:—Do you and I,—who can say, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee,"—do we sufficiently bless the Holy Spirit for giving us this jewel of love? If you love Christ, then say, "This love is given to me: it is a rare plant, an exotic, it never sprang out of my natural heart. Weeds will grow apace there, but not this fair flower." Bless the Holy Spirit for it. "Oh, but I do not love God as I ought!" No, brother, I know you do not, but bless him that you love him at all. Love God for the very fact that he has led you to love him; and that is the way to love him more. Love God for letting you love him. Love him for taking away the stone out of your heart, and giving you a heart of flesh. For the little grace that you see in your soul, thank God. You know when a man has been ill, the doctor says to him, "You are not well by a long way, but I hope you are on the turn." "Yes," says the man, "I feel very ill; but still I think I am a little better: the fever is less, and the swelling is going down." He mentions some little symptom, and the doctors pleased, because he knows that it indicates much: the disease is past the crisis. Bless God for a little grace!

Blame yourself that you have not more grace, but praise him to think you have any. Time was when I would have given my eyes and ears to be able to say, "I do love God;" and now that I do love him, I would give my eyes and ears to love him more. I would give all I have to get more love into my soul; but I am grateful to think I have a measure of true love and I feel its power. Do be grateful to the Holy Ghost. Worship and adore him specially and peculiarly. You say, "Why specially and peculiarly?" I answer—Because he is so much forgotten. Some people hardly know whether there be any Holy Ghost. Let the Father and the Son be equally adored; but be careful in reference to the Holy Spirit, for the failure of the church towards the Holy Trinity lies mainly in a forgetfulness of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore I press this upon you, and I beg you to laud and magnify the Holy Ghost, and sedulously walk in all affectionate gratitude towards him all your days. As your love increases, let your worship of the Holy Spirit become daily more and more conspicuous, because love is *his* fruit although it be *your* vital principle. To the God of love I commend you all. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Galatians v.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—23, 651, 649.

Metropolitan Tabernacle,
Newington Butts, London, S.E.
14th May, 1884.

REV. C. H. SPURGEON'S JUBILEE FUND.

Dear Friend,

It is widely known that Mr. Spurgeon will reach his FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY on the 19th June next. Public appreciation of his life-work has already marked that day as a festival, and preparations are being made to celebrate it in a suitable manner.

The intention has been announced to hold a meeting at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on the evening of Thursday, the 19th of June, to be presided over by the venerable Earl of Shaftesbury. This will be made the occasion of presenting Mr. Spurgeon with an address of congratulation and a testimonial of love and esteem.

At a representative social gathering, held on the 6th instant, it was unanimously resolved, that in addition to "The Jubilee House," in course of erection at the rear of the Tabernacle, the presentation shall consist of a Sum of Money, to be placed absolutely and unreservedly at his own disposal, except in any case where the donor specifies a particular object.

Over a thousand pounds were promised at once to open the Subscription List, and Messrs. T. H. Olney and W. C. Murrell were elected Treasurers of the Fund.

In addressing the intimate friends and ardent admirers of our Pastor, any reference to the services he has rendered to the universal Church of our Lord Jesus Christ would be superfluous. Of the Philanthropic Institutions he has planted and fostered, or of his manifold labours of love, we likewise forbear to speak. We simply invite you to join us in a tribute of personal regard to himself.

Many of us feel that his life touches our own at every vital point. The hearts and homes of great multitudes have become happier and holier by his ministry. We are sure that he has made his mark on his own generation with the truest instinct of which our manhood is capable. The echoes of his influence have extended to remote regions, till his name has become a household word in every part of the civilized world. And he has multiplied himself beyond our power of computation by means of the men whom he has trained and sent forth in our Country, our Colonies, and our Foreign Mission Stations; to say nothing of the many more men and women of maturer years who have proved the quickening force of his example and his leadership, and have been constrained to devote themselves with a noble enthusiasm to Christian work.

The list of love is now open to the spontaneous generosity of all who are ready to greet the opportunity. No further appeal will be made. As it is proposed to inscribe the names of contributors in the Testimonial, we shall feel obliged by an early response.

On behalf of the Deacons and Elders,

We have the honour to subscribe ourselves,

Yours faithfully,

T. H. OLNEY,
W. C. MURRELL.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

PENTECOST.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 1ST, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The day of Pentecost."—Acts ii. 1.

LOOKING into a silversmith's window on Thursday last I observed a notice card, upon which was printed as follows—"This shop will be closed this evening, and will not be re-opened until Tuesday evening." I looked at the name over the window, and observed that it belonged to one of the house of Israel. I had forgotten till that moment that we have now reached the Levitical feast of Pentecost, which contains among its regulations that no servile work is to be done; and hence all business is laid aside by the faithful Jew. Surely, the Jews in their care to observe their law deserve much praise. At what an expense must large trading firms suspend their business! They read a lesson to many professed Christians who seem to have little regard for the Lord's-day, break in upon its rest in a thousand frivolous ways, and half regret that they cannot pursue their earthly callings throughout the whole seven days of the week. It is true that we consider these days, and weeks, and sacred festivals to have become obsolete by the fulfilment of the great truths which they typified; but as this is not the judgment of the Jew because he has not received Jesus as the Messiah, we may at least learn from his strict observance of the Sabbath, and the Passover, and the feast of Pentecost, that it becomes us to study the spiritual meaning of these types, and to guard with care the one great festival which remains to the church, namely, the Lord's-day. On our Sabbath let us do no needless work, but seek rest both for body and soul.

We are now at the season called Pentecost. In the reading of the Scriptures I showed you out of Leviticus xxiii. that the first feast was the Passover, and that there is no feasting, no satisfaction, no peace, no rest, no joy, to any heart till first of all we have seen the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, who is our passover. When we have understood the great truth declared in Jehovah's word, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you," then we know what it is to dwell in safety within the blood-besprinkled doors, while the destroying angel passes by. Through the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, "we have peace

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." Under the covering of the blood of the Lord's passover, we feast upon the pascal Lamb, and thus our hunger is removed, our desires are satisfied, our strength is renewed, and our heart is made glad. As the result and outcoming of that passover, we do in fact what the Jews did in emblem on the morrow after the Passover-Sabbath—we confess that we are not our own, but are bought with a price, and that all that we have belongs to our redeeming Lord. On the morrow after the Sabbath the Israelite brought the wave-sheaf of his barley-harvest, which was waved before the Lord in type that every product of the soil, and all the result of man's labour, was from God, and belonged to God. So soon as we have fed upon Christ, and have come out of the house of bondage, we begin to enquire, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" It becomes an instinct with us to express our gratitude in one way or another. Without any deliberation or delay we conclude that if he has loved us, and given himself for us, we ought to show our love to him in some manifest form.

Seven clear weeks passed away from the waving of the sheaf of the barley harvest, and then came the feast of first-fruits for all the crops, and principally for the wheat harvest, which was then in full operation: this was Pentecost. In fifty days Israel was fully clear of Egypt, far away in the desert, and quite delivered from all fear of pursuing armies. Pharaoh's hosts had been destroyed, and the Red Sea rolled between Israel and her former oppressors. Then it was that they held a holy convocation. They did not bring to God in the wilderness the loaves of bread of first-fruits, for they had not yet reached the land which would yield them a harvest, but they held their convocation, and were instructed as to what their duty would be when they came to the promised land. When they actually reached their possessions in Canaan, they kept the fiftieth day, and held a solemn feast in which they presented unto the Lord two loaves of bread, made of fine flour from the new wheat. This offering dedicated the harvest. The teaching of this ceremony is just this:—"When you are saved, when you have entered into rest, when you have considered and deliberated, then renew your vows unto the Lord, make your consecration more large, and full and deliberate, and dedicate yourself and all that you have unto the Lord who has given you all things richly to enjoy. You have already, in the short time since you have known the sprinkled blood, obtained a harvest of joy and peace: therefore delay not to bring a worthy portion unto the Lord, and say unto him, 'Thou hast set me free, and made me to be thy servant, and now I offer to thee all that I am and all that I have, for thou hast bought me with thy precious blood.'"

> "Were the whole realm of nature mine,
> That were a present far too small;
> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all!"

Thus the three feasts can be understood by us in our own spiritual experience. We can keep them in spirit; let us do so at once. Let us again rehearse the passover by fresh faith in Jesus; let us renew our first dedication, which was like to the wave-sheaf; and then let us come

with solemn resolve, and after many days of sweet experience, let us renew our covenant before the Lord, saying—

> "High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
> That vow renew'd shall daily hear:
> Till in life's latest hour I bow,
> And bless in death a bond so dear."

We deliberately wish our loyalty to stand good to the end; we have no desire to draw back, but rather would we wish to be more completely the Lord's than ever we have been. We would bring "a new meat offering before the Lord," and keep the feast with great joy, ceasing from all servile work, but in the spirit of obedient children serving the Lord with gladness. Thus we read Pentecost by the light within.

On the larger platform of the Lord's doings for his church, the passover stands for the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus upon the cross, when he poured out his soul unto death, that by his blood we might be saved from wrath. The waving of the barley sheaf was carried out by our Lord's rising from the dead on the morrow after the Sabbath, when he rose from the dead and became the first-fruits of them that slept. The feast of first-fruits fifty days after his death is fulfilled by the descent of the Holy Ghost, giving to the church the first-fruits of the Spirit, and working the conversion of three thousand souls, who were thus the first-fruits from among the Jews. This beginning of blessing was followed by a revival which continued with the church at Jerusalem for a long time, and extended throughout all the world, till almost every nation had in a short time learned the doctrine of the cross, and multitudes had submitted unto Christ. Of this greater Pentecost we shall not fail to speak this morning: we shall dwell upon both the type and the antitype, and if I run them a little into one another, you must forgive me. The type is so admirable, and so many-sided, that it has its own actual lesson as well as its figurative lesson. I scarcely know where the type ends and where the antitype begins: but your meditations will easily set it right if I should make a muddle.

First, I shall speak upon *the consecrated harvest of the field*, which we shall illustrate by the passage out of Leviticus; then, secondly, upon *the consecrated harvest of our Lord Jesus Christ;* and, as a practical lesson, we shall close by considering *the consecrated harvest which should come from each soul* unto the redeeming Lord.

I. First, let us speak of THE CONSECRATED HARVEST OF THE FIELD. It may seem somewhat singular to you that we should be talking of harvest on this first day of June; but I beg you to remember that the Bible was not written in England, but in Palestine; and in that country the harvest is much earlier than in this northerly latitude, where the climate is so much more severe. An early day in June would be the average time for the fruits of the field to be ripe. At the beginning of the barley harvest the first ripe ears were presented to the Lord in due order, but at the fuller festival they brought into God's house, not the ears of wheat, but two large loaves of bread taken from their habitations,—the fruit of the earth actually prepared for human food. These loaves were offered unto the Lord with other sacrifices. What did that mean?

It meant, first, that *all came from God.* "We know that," says one.

Yes, we do know it, but we often talk as if it were not true. We regard our bread as the fruit of our own labour; which also is true, but it is only a small part of the truth: for who is he that gives us strength to labour, and gives the earth the power to bring forth her harvest from the seed which is sown in her furrows? It is not every man that accepts the mercies of daily providence as in very truth sent from God. I fear in many houses bread is eaten and the giver is forgotten. There may, perhaps, be a formal giving of thanks, but there is no heart in it. It is a horrible thing that men should live like brutes,—like dumb cattle, grazing but thinking nothing of him who causeth grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man. If any here have sunken into that brutish condition, may God deliver them from their degrading ingratitude! Oh, you Christian people, you are clothed by the charity of God, and fed by his bounty, and if you do not continually acknowledge that every good gift is from your heavenly Father, may the Lord have pity upon you, and bring you to your right minds! Poverty has been sometimes sent upon men because they were not grateful when they enjoyed abundance. Persons who can grumble when their board is loaded, must not wonder if one of these days they become so distressed as to pine for the crumbs which once fell from their table. Let us not provoke God to chasten us for our murmuring, but let us bless him this day for our life, our health, our bread, and our raiment; yea, and for the very air we breathe. All that is short of hell is more than we deserve. Let us by grateful offerings to the Lord express our thankfulness for all the comforts we enjoy.

The waving of those loaves before the Lord signified, next, that *all our possessions need God's blessing upon them.* It would be a horrible thing to be rich with unblessed riches, yet some are in that condition; and, consequently, the more they hoard, the more curse they lay up for themselves. Without a blessing from God his gifts become temptations, and bring with them care rather than refreshment. We read of some that "while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them." Thus it seems that the very bread on the table may prove a curse unless God shall bless it. It was, no doubt, a very joyous sight to see the loaves and the fishes multiplied for the crowd; but the best part of it was that ere fish or bread had been increased, the Master had looked up to heaven and blessed them. The people ate of blessed fish and blessed bread, and thus it nourished them. If thou hast little, my brother, yet if God has blessed thy little there is a flavour in it which the ungodly cannot know when they fill themselves with their stalled oxen. If thou hast an ample estate, yet if thou hast more blessing, thy riches shall not be a snare to thee; but thou shalt be able to endure prosperity, which to many is like the height of the craggy rock from which they are dashed down to destruction. God's blessing is what we want upon common life, yea, upon the leavened bread of daily life as well as upon the unleavened bread of our holy things. We want the Lord's blessing from morning to night, from the first day of the week till Saturday night. We need it on all we are, and have, and do. The Israelites brought the two loaves of leavened bread, praying the Lord to bless all the other loaves that would be baked out of the year's harvest; and the Lord did so.

Let us sanctify the bulk of our substance by the sacrifice unto the Lord of what is needed for his holy service.

It meant, next, *all that we have we hold under God as his stewards.* These two loaves were a kind of peppercorn rent acknowledging the superior landlord who was the true owner of the Holy Land. The two loaves were a quit rent, as much as to say, "O Lord, we own that this is thy soil, and we are tenants at will." We farm our portions as bailiffs for our God; we gather the fruit of it as stewards for the Most High, and bring a part thereof to his altar in token that we would use the rest to his glory. Have we all done this with our substance? Do we continually dedicate all that we have unto our God, and stand to the dedication? Do we make a conscientious use of such temporal benefits as the Lord entrusts to us? Where is that one talent of thine, O slothful servant? Where are those five talents, O thou man of influence and of wealth? If thou hast not traded with them for the Great Master, what art thou but an embezzler of thy Master's goods, false to thy trust? Beware lest he come and say to thee, "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." The faithful believer will bring unto the Lord with gladness the Lord's portion, and thus confess that everything he has is, like himself, the royal possession of the King of kings.

Again, the bringing of those loaves signified that *they were afraid they might commit sin in the using of what God had given.* The first thank-offering, as we have seen, was of barley, fresh plucked from the field. There was nothing evil about that; and so our Lord when risen from the dead made a pure and perfect presentation unto the Lord: but this second offering of the first-fruits was not wheat as God made it, but a loaf of bread in which there was leaven. Somehow human nature seems to crave for leaven with the pure flour; and so the Israelite brought to God not his pure gift, but that form of it which is used by man for his nourishment. Why was it ordained that they should present leaven to God? Was it not meant to show us that common life, with all its imperfections, may yet be used for God's glory? We may, through our Lord Jesus, be accepted in shop-life as well as in sanctuary-life, in market-dealing as well as in sacramental meditation. Life, as it comes to common people in their daily labour and in their domestic relationships, is to be holiness unto the Lord. Yet do not fail to notice that when they brought these two leavened loaves they brought with them a burnt-offering of seven lambs, without blemish, and one young bullock, and two rams: the Holy Ghost thus signifying that our daily lives, and services, and gifts cannot be accepted in and of themselves, but we must bring therewith the true sweet-savour offering of our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself without spot unto God. The precious blood of his sacrifice must fall upon our leavened loaves, or they will be sour before the Lord. We can never be accepted except in that one ordained way,—"He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." Christ's sacrifice is so sweet that it perfumes our offerings, and renders that acceptable which else would have been rejected. This poor leavened cake of ours has the elements of corruption in it; but lo, here in Jesus we have a savour which is sweet unto the Lord, and the Lord is well pleased with us for his righteousness' sake.

Nay, that was not all. In consideration of the loaf being leavened, they brought with it a sin-offering as well. "Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin-offering." See Leviticus xxiii. 19. Confessing, as each one of us must do, that however hearty our dedication to God, there is still a faultiness in our lives, we are glad to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. However much we labour to live wholly and alone unto God's glory, yet in many things we offend and come short of the glory of God. We bring a sacrifice for sin because it is needed; we confess the iniquities of our holy things. That loaf which we present is of fine flour, but it is baked with leaven, and therefore a sin-offering is needed. O man of God, never try to bring any prayer, or any act of penitence, or any deed of faith, or any gift of love, to God apart from the great sin-offering of Jesus Christ! Thou art a saint, but thou art still a sinner; and though thou art clean before men, yet when thou comest before God his pure and holy eyes behold folly and defilement in thee which nothing can put away except the cleansing blood of Christ. "If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another"; yet still we sin, for it is written, "and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," which it could not do if there were no sin to put away even then. It is to my mind a great joy that you and I can give to God the first-fruits of our substance, and can dedicate to him our time and talents, and that in so doing we need not be afraid of rejection, because we bring with us the sweet-savour offering of Jesus Christ, which is his righteousness, and the sin-offering of Jesus Christ which he offered when he was made to be sin for us.

Let us learn one more lesson: *all this was done as an act of joy.* A new meat-offering was offered unto the Lord with peace-offerings, which two offerings always signify, among other things, a quiet, happy communion with God. In addition to all this they presented a drink-offering of wine, which expresses the joy of the offerer. Pentecost was not a fast, it was a festival. When thou givest anything to God, give it not as though it were a tax, but render it freely; or it cannot be accepted. If thou doest anything for the Lord thy God, do it not as of forced labour demanded by a despot, whom thou wouldst gladly refuse if thou couldst. Thou doest nothing unto God, if it be not done of a willing mind. God loveth a cheerful giver. He wants no slaves to grace his throne: you shall hear no crack of whips in all the domains of our great Lord. His service is perfect freedom; to give to him is rapture; to live to him is heaven. When we shall perfectly serve him we shall be in our glory, which is his glory. The sinking of self is the rising of joy. Beloved, the Lord would not have any of you give of your substance to him with rueful countenance, squeezing it out as though you were losing a drop of blood. Give nothing if you cannot give heartily, but do everything unto the Lord with all your heart, and soul, and strength. The Lord would not have the ark of the covenant dragged by unwilling beasts, but he ordained that it should be carried upon the willing shoulders of chosen men, to whom the service was an honour and a delight. He would have his servants sing in their joyous hymns, "God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." He would have each one gladly say, "O Lord, truly I am

thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds."

II. Thus far we have been considering part of the lesson of the original Jewish Pentecost. Now we must hasten on to consider, in the second place, THE CONSECRATED HARVEST OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, as taught by the events of the great Christian Pentecost described in the Acts of the Apostles. Our Lord is the greatest of all sowers, for he sowed himself. Did he not say, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit"? Our Lord had been sown in his death and burial: and since such a corn of wheat as this is quick in growing, and soon yields a harvest, in fifty days there comes a time for the ingathering of the first-fruits. Had he not said, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest"? and now, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, the fruit was seen of them, and joyfully gathered. Let us learn some lessons from the Christian Pentecost.

First, learn that *the first harvest of our Lord Jesus Christ was through the Holy Ghost.* There were no three thousand converts till first of all was heard the rushing of mighty wind. Till the cloven tongues had rested on the little company of disciples there were no broken hearts among the crowd. Until the believers were all filled with the Holy Ghost the minds of their hearers were not filled with conviction. We are longing, greatly longing, for our Lord Jesus to see of the travail of his soul, and to be satisfied in this congregation, and in this city. How we long to see millions brought to Christ! I am sure some of us feel a heart-break till whole nations come to Jesus' feet; and this cannot be except by the special power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will bless the world by filling the church with his own might. If I want my hearers converted, I must first of all myself be filled with the Holy Ghost. I know that I address a great many workers, and I therefore say to each one of them—pay great attention to your own spiritual state. If you desire to save your class you must yourself be endowed with the power of the Holy Ghost. You cannot burn a way for the truth into the heart of another unless the tongue of fire is given to you from on high. Mind this. I tried last Sabbath-day to exhort you to pay much reverence and honour to the Holy Spirit, who is so often forgotten in the church of God. I pray you take good heed to the exhortation. Do maintain a grateful spirit towards the Holy Ghost, paying special honour unto him, for he worketh all our works in us, and without him there will be neither sheaves nor loaves of the harvest to offer unto the Lord. The ingathering of the revival at Pentecost was wrought by the Holy Spirit.

That day when the Spirit of God was given may be considered to be the ordering of the Christian dispensation. You may not have noticed it, but if you will count the days you will find that it was exactly fifty days after the original passover that the law was given on Mount Sinai. Many careful readers have observed this, but have feared to attach importance to the fact because the Jews did not connect it with Pentecost. Neither Philo nor Josephus speak of the giving of the law as happening at the time known as Pentecost. But that has nothing to do with us. We are not bound to be blind to a matter because Josephus, or Philo, or

all the Jewish writers did not happen to see it. They are not Rabbis to us. The Jews did not at that time see all in the law which they have seen since, and we having the law in our hands are bound to examine for ourselves. It was at Pentecost that God descended upon Mount Sinai, and the national laws of Israel were proclaimed together with those ten commands which are the standard of equity for all mankind. Moses asked of Pharaoh on the behalf of Israel that they might keep a feast unto Jehovah their God in the wilderness; and this was no mere pretext, but a truthful statement. They did keep a holy season as they proposed; they summoned a special assembly of the elders, and sanctified the people as soon as the turmoil of their leaving Egypt had subsided. On the fiftieth day after the Exodus the Lord came down in the sight of all Israel upon Sinai. The trumpet was held from the top of Horeb, and Sinai was altogether on a smoke. Now we assert that as the inauguration of the law was on Pentecost, so also was the inauguration of the Gospel. At the commencement of the Old Testament dispensation, what manifestation do we get? God gives his people *a law.* At the commencement of the New Testament dispensation, what do we get? A law? No, the Lord gives his people *the Spirit.* That is a very different matter. Under the old covenant the command was given; but under the new covenant the will and the power to obey are bestowed upon us by the Holy Ghost. No more have we the law upon stone, but the Spirit writes the precept upon the fleshy tablets of the heart. Moses on the mount can only tell us what to do, but Jesus ascended on high pours out the power to do it. Now we are not under the law, but under grace, and the Spirit is our guiding force. In the church of God our rule is not according to the letter of a law, but according to the Spirit of the Lord. Some people look for a specific ordinance for every item of procedure on the part of the church; but, so far as I can see, there is a singular absence of written rule and ritual concerning particulars, apart from the two great standing ordinances. I do believe that under this dispensation saints are left to the freedom of the Spirit, and are not specifically commanded in every detail by a written law. Neither this form of church government, nor that is forced upon us; but life is permitted to assume its own necessary form, under the moulding power of the Holy Ghost. Because we are to become men in Christ and to be no longer children, we are directed not so much to a specific law as to certain great geneal principles which are made to be our guide through the Holy Spirit. Servants, you know, must be told to do this and that, at such an hour, and in such a way; but loving, obedient children may be left free to obey the dictates of their loving hearts. We love the inspired Book which reveals to us the mind of God, and we revere it all the more because the Lord himself who inspired the Book dwells among us to conduct us by its holy instruction in all things. The Lord is among us in a higher degree than ever he was in Sinai, where bounds were set to keep off the trembling people. The Lord is in the midst of his people in love and fellowship, and by the indwelling Spirit whereby he leads the sacred marchings of his redeemed. Pentecost was thus the inauguration of the gospel dispensation.

This Pentecost was also *the beginning of a great harvest of Jews and Gentiles.* Were there not two loaves? Not only shall Israel be saved,

but the multitude of the Gentiles shall be turned unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and he shall see of his soul's travail in those whom his Father gave him from before the foundation of the world. If the first-fruits were so great, what will the ultimate harvest be? Let us look for whole kingdoms to submit themselves to Jesus.

That day of Pentecost, or feast of first-fruits, what was it? Did it consist in many conversions only? No. I believe that *the filling of the apostles with the Holy Ghost was a part of the first-fruits* of the day of Pentecost. We ourselves who are born to God, whenever the Holy Spirit visits us in his fulness, and sanctifies and elevates us, are a large part of our Lord's reward. A man full of the Holy Ghost rejoices the heart of Christ. Your poor starveling Christians, who have a name to live and nothing more, who shiver over Christ's commands, and never plunge into his service to find waters to swim in, bring him little honour and little pleasure; but when we are filled with the Holy Ghost we make men see the glory of his grace, and his name is magnified in the esteem of all onlookers.

Still, the major part of the Pentecostal first-fruits will be found in *the great number that were that day converted.* How much we desire the like blessing as a church, for ourselves, and all other churches. We hope to receive some seventy-five to-day, but what is this to three thousand? We are not without additions to the church every month, but oh that the Lord would add to us daily. Why should it not be? Persuade the people to come and hear. Pray for them and for the preacher while they are hearing; and watch for their souls after hearing, and we shall yet see a far larger increase.

The Christian Pentecost is to us full of instruction. Learn you its lessons. First, *the disciples had to wait for it.* "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth." Sow on. If you have to wait a week of weeks or a week of years, wait with confidence, for Pentecost will yet yield its loaves unto the Lord.

They obtained nothing until they began preaching the gospel, and then in one day the church was multiplied by twenty-five. O! when shall each member bring in five-and-twenty in a day by preaching the word. Those three thousand souls were due to the testimony of Jesus by the disciples. The Spirit of God was there, but he did not work upon men apart from the means which he has ordained. Peter stood up with the eleven. They preached Christ crucified, and then the people believed. Oh, for a great day of preaching, when all shall turn out and preach. If all the Lord's servants and handmaids began to publish his salvation, we should soon wake up these sleepy millions, and London would be all on the move towards better things. A great multitude must preach the gospel if we are to have a great multitude converted by it.

Of all those people saved, it was acknowledged that they belonged unto the Lord alone. When they were pricked to the heart and believed in Jesus, they came at once and were baptized. As they were dead to the world, it was meet that they should be openly buried with Christ in baptism. So consecrated were they that their lives were wholly given to their Lord. In a very especial manner it was so with them, for they had all things common; they lived a heavenly life here below. We read, "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and

breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Thoroughly did they give unto God the glory of their salvation, for they were wholly occupied with "praising God": so we are told in the last verse of the chapter from which we have culled our text.

Yet if even we should see three thousand converted in a day *we must not reckon that such first-fruits would be absolutely perfect.* In the first Pentecost, as we have seen, leavened cakes were presented to God, so in all our successes and additions there will sure to be a leaven. Do not wonder if some converts go back; if others turn out to be hypocrites, or merely temporary converts. It will always be so, and we should not think it a new and strange trial; tares grow with the wheat, and bad fish are taken in the same net with the good. Therefore let the church in her best success keep still to Christ and his precious blood, and daily turn to his finished sacrifice. Let us use upon the large scale as well as in our own personal concerns the great sacrifice for sin; and when we admit members into the church wholesale let us continually plead the precious blood that each one may be dedicated to God thereby. Be this our motto: "None but Jesus, None but Jesus!" Let us exalt the Lamb of God, the sin-atoning Lamb. These converts and this success can only be accepted in the beloved.

But with all our care and prudence *let us not damp our joy;* for the feast of first-fruits is ever to be a gladsome occasion. So the type teaches us, and so let the fact always be with us. Oh, brothers, on that day on which I lately saw forty persons one by one, and listened to their experience and proposed them to the church, I felt as weary as ever a man did in reaping the heaviest harvest. I did not merely give them a few words as enquirers, but examined them as candidates with my best judgment. I thought that if I had many days of that sort I must die, but I also wished it might be my lot to die in that fashion. Having so many coming to confess Christ my mind was crushed beneath the weight of blessing, but I would gladly be overwhelmed again. O that my hearers would thus oppress me every week of my life! Pray the Lord to send us day after day such additions to the church that we shall be scarcely able to hear all the testimonies of what the Lord has done for them. Then let us sing, "Hallelujah, Hallelujah," every day in the week and every hour of the day. Let us rejoice and be glad, and give a hearty welcome to those who come into the church, and hearty praise to God who sends them.

So much about the Pentecost at Jerusalem. God send a Pentecost like it to Newington Butts, and to every other place.

III. The last thing was to be THE CONSECRATED HARVEST FROM EACH PARTICULAR PERSON. What I have to say is not mine, but the Lord's. If you open your Bibles at Deuteronomy xxvi. you will find there a form of service which I pray may serve your turn to-day. After the first offering on behalf of the nation consecrating all the harvest, individuals began to bring their first fruits personally, even to the very end of the year. Whenever the olives had been pressed, or the figs had been gathered, or the grapes had been trodden, or the wheat-fields had been reaped, the truly believing Israelite took a part of his crop to the House of God, and presented it as a love-token. "And it shall be, when

thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; that thou shall take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shall go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God." See how the offerer began,—"I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us." I wish to stand here this morning and to say for myself what I hope you can say each one for himself, "I am come to the land of peace and rest which the Lord promised to believers. I am become a possessor of all things in Christ." That is the reason why I would bring my offering. If the Lord has brought you into the goodly land of salvation you too should bring your sacrifice unto him.

After this the offerer went on to say: "A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage." Here was an admission of a former state of misery. Must we not also say that we were in bondage, but that the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and set us free from our oppressors? I can say so, and I know I am speaking the mind of hundreds of you. The Lord has delivered you; your sin is pardoned, your iniquities are covered; you are free from the power of sin; you walk at liberty in righteousness; you are come into the land of promise; you have entered into rest. That is abundant reason for bringing your love-gift unto the Lord.

Then the man said also, "The Lord hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey." Thus we also glory in our happiness and peace in Christ Jesus. Ours is a blessed lot. It is a good thing to be a Christian; it is a blessed privilege to be a child of God; it is a delightful boon to be a partaker of the covenant and all the blessings stored up therein. Do we not say so? I am sure we do; and therefore it is that we bring our thank-offering as a token that we love the Lord, and desire to praise him for all that he has done for us.

Then the offerer presented his first-fruits, and said, "And now, behold, I have brought the first-fruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, hast given me."

When he had made his offering spontaneously and freely because God had done so much for him, then he went home to enjoy all the good things which God had given him. He did not feel as if he were practising self-indulgence when he ate of his figs or partook of his pomegranates, for his fruits in the lump were sanctified by the first-fruits being made holy unto the Lord. He was not afraid to partake of the bounties of providence, for he had received of the bounties of grace. He did not eat what had never been blessed of God, but he went his

way and heard the priest say, as he left the sanctuary, "Thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you." Then he understood the language of Solomon, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." Thus may the true believer receive with gladness the supplies which his heavenly Father gives him, and if he, for Christ's sake, and the love of men, abstains from partaking of wine, he abstains with greater delight than he ever had in drinking it. Regarding nothing as common or unclean, let us in everything give thanks, and whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, let us glorify God, and feel that he blesses us. This earth which once was accursed becomes to holy men a place of blessing, the vestibule of glory, none other than the House of God, and the very gate of heaven.

Oh, you that have never eaten of the Pascal lamb, that have never been sprinkled with his blood, you cannot know anything about this: you cannot offer anything to God: you cannot receive his blessing upon your daily lives, because you have not first of all accepted salvation by the atoning blood. I wish you would now come to Jesus: I pray God you may. But, oh, if you have known the power of the death of Christ, and so are pardoned, do not miss the further joy of a consecrated life, the joy of spending and being spent for him who redeemed you. The Lord your God is so blessed in himself that when you give yourself to him his blessedness overflows and fills you. Nothing is so much ours as what is wholly God's; and when we are not our own, then by some strange logic we are most our own. When we have most fully practised self-denial, then the best riches and the rarest wealth and the truest blessedness is ours. God help us to test this statement, and so to keep the feast. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Leviticus xxiii. 4—21; Acts ii. 1—8, 14—21, 37—42.

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UNBELIEF CONDEMNED AND FAITH COMMENDED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 8TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"They are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith."——Deuteronomy xxxii. 20.

"Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust."—Psalm xl. 4.

THESE two texts will serve to show the different estimate which God has of unbelief and of faith. He says of unbelievers, in my text taken from Deuteronomy, "They are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith"; as much as to say, that the absence of faith proves them to be froward, presumptuous, wilful, disobedient; a people at cross purposes with God. He says not only that they are perverse and froward, but he adds an emphatic word—"they are a *very* froward generation, children in whom is no faith." The second text most clearly shows us that God has a high approbation for faith; for he himself by the Holy Ghost says, "Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust." Here, then, we have set before us a great evil to which we are sadly inclined, and a great grace which we greatly need. May God the Holy Spirit work faith in us by his own gracious power! Alas, it is still true that "all men have not faith." Even when an apostle preached, we read of the congregation that some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. There is that division among you at this time. Oh, that unbelievers may become believers before this service ends!

I will tell you what I shall be driving at this morning: I have a special character in view, and I long to be made useful to persons of that sort. Outspoken and naked unbelief the most of you abhor. Should unbelief display itself in its real hideousness, you who have been brought up religiously would be startled at its approach, would close the door immediately, and bolt it fast lest such a demon of the deep should gain an entry into your souls. Consequently, unbelief when it attacks the regular hearer of the gospel takes care to disguise itself. It feigns to be something other than it is. It does not walk abroad in all its natural deformity, but it approaches us as the Gibeonites came near to Israel when "they did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors." There are those here who do not doubt for a moment the existence or goodness of God, neither have they any question

about the inspiration and infallible truth of Holy Scripture; and yet they are entertaining within their hearts an unbelief which doth eat as doth a canker. A deadening unbelief is upon them, so that they abide in darkness, and take no pains to come into the light. Yet they do not condemn themselves, but rather look for pity as though it were their infirmity and not their fault. To them unbelief acts like Jezebel when she tired her head and painted her face. Oh, that my words could strip off the disguise of this evil thing! Of this most deceitful form of unbelief I would say, as Jehu said of Jezebel, "Throw her down"; and then I would cry,—Go see now this cursed thing and bury it, for it is a horrible evil. That which prevents men from finding salvation by putting their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ is an enemy so hateful and malicious that no quarter must be given to it; no excuse must be made for it; it must be utterly destroyed from under heaven.

Dear friend, you tell me that you are by no means an infidel or a sceptic, and yet you do not believe so as to find peace with God. You tell me that you cannot believe, which is a confession that you are so false at heart that you cannot believe the truth. It is well that you should own to this gross depravity; but I have reason to fear that you are hardly conscious of the horrible nature of the crime which you acknowledge. I beg you to lay to heart this fact, that unless you have faith in Jesus you will perish just as surely as if you were an open denier of the word of God and a reviler of his Son. There are, doubtless, degrees in the terribleness of the punishment, but there are no degrees in the certainty of the fact that every unbeliever will be shut out from the blessing of the gospel of Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." I want you to remove every flattering unction from your souls, and to know of a surety that "he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God" (John iii. 18.) Dream not that because you do not happen to be an avowed atheist, or deist, or agnostic, that therefore your own form of unbelief is harmless. We read of Israel in the wilderness that "they could not enter in because of unbelief;" yet they were not atheists. A passive unbelief will ruin a man as surely as an active infidelity. Suppose that an enemy is on this side of a river destroying everybody. To find safety the river has to be crossed, and there is but one bridge. Yonder man declares that he will never go over such a bridge; he does not believe in it; he asserts that it is a rotten old thing, which would break down under his weight. He hates the structure; he will not call it a bridge at all; he ridicules all who venture upon it. It is clear that he will stay on this side the river, and die by the pursuer's sword. He is the type of the avowed sceptic. *But where are you?* You say with unfeigned distress, "I am horrified to hear that man talk so of that excellent bridge; I believe that it is well constructed, and that it has carried hundreds of thousands over. I cannot bear to hear a word said against it, for my dear father and mother found refuge by crossing it, and they are now in the land of peace." Yet you do not escape by that bridge yourself, though well aware of your danger! Do you answer, "Well, I do not feel worthy to go over it." Why, that is nonsense; it is as if you should say, I cannot swim, and therefore

will not cross over the river by means of the bridge. Your unworthiness cannot be a reason for refusing to accept a free salvation; on the contrary, it is a reason why you should accept it at once. However, it matters little what your excuse may be; you will perish for ever if you do not believe in Jesus.

Take another illustration. A fatal disease is abroad, and a remedy has been discovered of the most effectual kind. One man denounces the medicine, the physician who invented it, and the apothecaries who distribute it: he can hardly find words enough in the dictionary with which to express his contempt for what he calls a monstrous quackery. He will evidently receive no benefit from the medicine. That is not your case: you are of quite another mind. You esteem the medicine, reverence the physician, and even feel an affection for the apothecaries who distribute it. No question about the matter has ever crossed your mind; on the contrary, you are an advocate for the great remedy, and believe firmly that it has healed multitudes of persons. *Why do you not take the wholesome draught yourself?* You tell me that you are trying to get better; and that you do not quite see how the medicine can heal you. This shows that you mistrust the power of the medicine to heal you, just as you are. You will derive no more benefit from it than the other man who rails at it. It is quite impossible that any man should receive the blessing which comes through the atoning blood of Christ unless he has faith; and whether he goes to the length of an utter contempt of the great Sacrifice, or stands off from it because he does not feel as he could desire, he will surely die without forgiveness. Out of Christ the doom of eternal wrath will fall on you, whether near to the kingdom or far off from it.

I want to talk with those unbelieving people who are not avowedly sceptical. Some of these I have seen, and I know that they are a numerous class. They are very sincere, and are really seeking after salvation; but the one thing which they refuse to do is to believe in the Lord Jesus. They will not trust their God, they will not believe in the promise which he has made to us in Christ Jesus. They would suffer any penance, they would give anything they possess, they would cut off their right arm, they would consent to lose their eyes, if they might but be saved; but this one matter of trust in God and accepting his way of salvation is the point in which they quarrel with the Most High. Upon this matter, in which the Lord will assuredly never yield to them, they stand out very obstinately, and so prove that they are "a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." If they would obtain the Lord's blessing, the only way to it is faith. Oh, that they would hold out no longer, for "Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust."

I. To begin, then: our first statement is, UNBELIEF IS FROWARDNESS—"They are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." One very frequent disguise of unbelief is that of humility. "I feel myself such a great sinner; I feel so much evil to be in my heart; I dare not believe in Jesus!" If you judged by appearances you might think this unbelief very modest; but, indeed, it is not so. It imitates the tone of humility, but it cannot catch the accent. This deceptive vice dares to hint that the sinner's unworthiness is a reason why Jesus should not be trusted. What, would any man tell me that his own

wickedness is a reason why he should distrust *me?* That would be too absurd. Because you are such a sinner, is God therefore a deceiver, and not to be trusted? This is not humility, but audacity. Our fearing to trust the promise of God because we are evil is a most perverse piece of wickedness. Surely, God is true, even if we are liars; and our falsehood does not make him false, or deprive him of his right to be believed. Do we dare to tell him that he cannot save when he assuredly promises to save us if we trust him? Do we deny his willingness to save when he sends us gracious invitations, and entreats us to turn to him? This is insolence, and not penitence. However great a sinner you may be, there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared, for "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Do not deny this. Do not be so profanely bold as to give the lie to Jesus.

Unbelief claims to be so timid. It cries, "I am afraid to come to Christ, afraid to trust him with my soul." This is not true fear, but an evil pride. The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau. The sound is that of an amiable timorousness, but the spirit is that of frowardness. Friends, if you truly feared God you would tremble at the idea of distrusting him. It is a very daring act of impiety to question any promise of the Most High; it is the height of rebellion to deny the power of the death of his dear Son. That kind of timidity and humility is to be shunned and to be abhorred which dares to make God's love a dream, and his mercy a fiction. Since the Lord's mercy endureth for ever, since Jesus has never yet cast out a soul that has come to him, it is folly to talk of being afraid to come to him. Dread doubting; but fear not to trust your God.

Unbelief is a very froward thing; we repeat the statement, and go on to prove it, because, in the first place, *it gives God the lie.* Can anything be worse than this? God saith, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," and the unbeliever replies, "I cannot believe that Jesus will save me." That is to say, translating it into plain English:—You do not think that God speaks the truth; you do not believe that God is able to make his promises good to you. You do, in effect, imagine that he has said a great deal more than he means, or promised more than he is able to perform. At any rate, you think it unsafe to trust him with your soul. I do beseech you, if you must transgress, do not select a sin so presumptuous and so provoking as the sin of denying the truth of the Most High. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Oh, you poor, timorous soul, as some would call you, I may not flatter you, or excuse you, for I am afraid you must be very proud or you would not look the great Father in the face, and say, "Thou wilt not receive me if I come back to thee like the prodigal child"; when again and again he invites you to return, and promises to receive you. O soul, can you dare to look up to the cross of Jesus and say, "There is no life in a look at the Crucified One for me"? Can you even think of the Holy Spirit, and then say that he has no power to change a heart so black and hard as yours? Oh that this miserable slander of God and of his Christ might be stopped!

Again, unbelief is great frowardness because *it refuses God's way of*

salvation. No man can read the Scriptures without seeing that God's way of salvation is not by works nor by feelings, but by trusting in the Son of God, who has offered a full atonement for sin. Now the sinner says, "Lord, I would do or suffer anything if I might thereby be saved." God's answer is, "Trust in my Son"; and this is put into a great many shapes to make it plain. Jesus says, "This is the work of God,"—the highest and noblest work—"that ye believe on him whom he hath sent"; but the soul wriggles away from this believing in Jesus. It cries, "Surely I must feel this, that, and the other." Oh foolish heart, stop all these vain observations, and listen to this one thing—Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. If thou wilt make the Lord thy trust thou shalt be blessed; but if thou wilt not thou art assuredly accursed, seeing thou hast rejected the blood of the Eternal Sacrifice, refused the way of mercy which infinite love has appointed, and done despite to the Spirit of God. To what a pitch of madness hast thou reached! Thou wilt sooner destroy thine own soul than treat thy God as thou wouldst treat an honest man! Thou canst trust thy wife, thy husband, thy father, or thy friend; but thou wilt not trust thy Maker. Thou wilt sooner go to hell than trust thyself with Christ. Ah me! Ah me!

Unbelief is a very froward thing, again, because *it very often makes unreasonable demands of God.* When Thomas said, "Except I put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe," he was speaking very frowardly. I have heard the sinner say, "Oh, sir, if I could have a dream, if I could be broken down with anguish, or if I could enjoy some remarkable revelation, then I would believe God"; this also is frowardness. And so thou darest look the Eternal in the face and say, "Thou shalt be a liar to me unless thou wilt gratify my whims and wishes, and do this or that to prove what I admit to be true." Will you say to your fellow-man, "Sir, you have offered to help me in this time of need; I am quite willing to depend upon you for that help, provided you will do it in my way; but the way which you propose for my assistance I utterly reject"? You will probably turn your friend against you if you talk so. Beggars must not be choosers—certainly not with God. If I mistrust a friend who has been good to me all my life, it is an unjust thing; and if I tell him that I cannot believe him unless he will do what I choose to demand of him, I am insulting him. This towards man is evil; but what is it towards God? What! must God do according to our mind, and play the lackey to us, or else he shall be under this penalty, that we will not believe his word nor accept his gracious forgiveness? Shame on unbelief, that it should be so insulting to the God of heaven, before whom angels bow with veiled countenances! Surely, the devil himself cannot go further than unbelief; nor so far; for he believes, and trembles.

Unbelief is very froward, next, because *it indulges hard thoughts of God.* Why do you not trust your God to save you by the blood of Jesus? Do you say that "Salvation by faith is too good to be true"? Is anything too good to come from God, who is infinitely good? Is he not love? Do you say, "If I were to come to him he would not receive me"? How darest thou say *that* when it is written, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"? Oh, I have so offended that if I

were to cry, "Father, I have sinned," I could not expect him to forgive my offence. This is a base slandering of the heavenly Father! What penitent has he ever repelled? Thou knowest not how good he is—He is inconceivably gracious, he delighteth in mercy. It is his joy to pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin. Hast thou never heard that "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than your ways, and his thoughts than your thoughts"? Has he not declared that he will abundantly pardon? Has he not said, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool"? Why will you so cruelly defame the ever-merciful one? Turn from this wickedness, or you will destroy your own soul.

And yet again, unbelief is a very froward thing because *it disparages the Lord Jesus.* It tramples upon the blood of the Son of God. The unbelieving sinner virtually asserts that he has found out the limit of the Saviour's power to save, and that he stands just over the margin to which his grace extends; for he thinks that Jesus may save any one except himself. O soul, dost thou doubt the infinite virtue of the divine sacrifice? Dost thou question the power of the intercession of the risen Lord? Is it not true, as he hath said it, that he is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"? "Oh, but I am such a singular person." And art thou so singular that thou hast a right to limit the Holy One of Israel? Oh, if thou didst but know my Lord and Master thou wouldst not talk so; for he with a word can cast out devils, heal the sick, and raise the dead. He hath but to say "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee," and they are forgiven. He has but to look on thee, poor sinner, and thou shalt live. Yea, be assured that if thou wilt look on him thou shalt live. Hath he not said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth"? Has he not also said, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"? If thou believest thou shalt see the glory of God. Trust him, trust him! He deserves thy trust; for he is a great Saviour for the greatest of sinners.

And do you not think it is another instance of great frowardness that unbelief *casts reflections upon the Holy Spirit?* It seems to say, "I feel sorely afraid, and therefore there is no peace for me. I am too hardened and foolish for the Holy Spirit to lead me to faith in Jesus; and therefore I will not trust." "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Change thee, man? Why, he hath turned millions from darkness to light. Look upward, see what hosts surround the throne of glory and "day without night" magnify his saving grace! Not save thee? Who art thou that thou shouldst stand out against the witness of the Spirit of truth? Wilt thou refuse the three-fold witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood? Who art thou that thou shouldst set thyself up as a kind of vanquisher of grace, conquering grace by thy sin, and saying to the ocean of God's love, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further"? Thine unbelief is a very froward thing; nothing can be said for it; it dishonours Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; denies the inspired Scripture, and keeps thine own soul in cruel bondage.

This vile unbelief *has in it a tendency to destroy the gospel itself.* If it could but have its own way it would undermine the whole fabric of

salvation. When a man says that God cannot save him he suggests that there may be others in the like case. Where, then, is Christ's wisdom in bidding us preach the gospel to every creature? If it would be vain for one man to believe, each one of us would be afraid that it would be vain for us also, and where, then, would be the gospel promise? If it could be proved that any one man if he believed in Jesus would not be saved, then the gospel itself would be disproved. Who among us would have any ground for believing in Christ if we knew that it was possible to believe in him and yet to be cast away? What is this but to rob us all of hope? Why, man, you are scuttling the ship! I mean that such is the tendency of your unbelieving talk. If Jesus is not worthy to be trusted, and you seem to say so by your own refusal to trust him, then all of us who are resting upon him for salvation are under a delusion. Dost thou mean to say this? If thou, as a sinner, canst not be saved upon believing in Christ, then the whole gospel is called in question; thou hast broken the whole staff of bread for the souls of men. Oh, wicked unbelief, God-dishonouring, soul-killing unbelief! Dear hearer, be warned against it, for it will shut thee out of heaven unless thou shut it out of thy heart.

II. And now, secondly, we turn to the better side of our subject, and remark that FAITH HAS THE DIVINE APPROVAL. "Blessed," says God, "is that man that maketh the Lord his trust." *We are sure that it is so.* Wherever there is faith, God is pleased with it; for faith is the sure mark of God's elect. We can only know them by their believing in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. God would never have set that of which he disapproved to be the mark of his eternal choice; but as he makes faith in Jesus to be the token of his covenanted ones, he must approve of it.

Remember, that God has been pleased in his great love to make this the main requirement of the gospel. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The Lord puts faith into the very forefront because he delights in it. I find not that the Lord has promised salvation to love, or to patience, or to courage, admirable as these graces are; but he has put this crown upon the head of faith—"Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." The Lord must certainly approve of that which he makes to be the grand necessity of salvation.

Dost thou not know that God has made faith to be the one thing needful in the matter of prayer? If thou comest before him in prayer he will not ask thee to bring thy hands laden with gifts, nor to drop from thy tongue choice words of eloquence; but thou "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," or else thou canst have nothing at his hands. If, then, God has made the efficacy of prayer to turn upon faith, he must have a high estimate of it. He has made faith to be the master-key by which all the chambers of his treasury may be unlocked, and therefore depend upon it he will never cast it out as unwarranted and presumptuous. "Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust," whoever that man may be.

Beside that, he has been pleased to make faith to be the mode and manner of the spiritual life. "The just shall live"—how? by works? No—"the just shall live by faith." There is no living except by

faith. Let any child of God try to live by sense or reason, even for a day, and see how miserable he will be. It comes to this with me—I must believe my God or else I perish. I can walk the waves by faith; but beginning to doubt, I sink. It is only as I trust that my soul can bear her daily burden and perform her daily duty. If, then, God has made faith to be the way of his people, rest assured it can never be wrong for a soul to exercise faith in him.

Why, brethren, see what God has done to make us believe! He cannot object to our trusting in him, seeing he works to that end. For this purpose the Scriptures are in our hands. John says, "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John xx. 31). The Lord multiplies his exceeding great and precious promises that we might have strong consolation, and find it easy to put our trust in him. His Holy Spirit comes on purpose to work faith in the soul, and the witness of the Holy Spirit in the word, and in the hearts of his people, is intended to create and nourish faith in God. The Lord rewards faith even in this life. Read the eleventh of Hebrews, see what men gained, what they enjoyed, what they did, by faith. Unbelief does nothing, gets nothing, rejoices in nothing; but faith wins the blessing. The covenant was made with Abraham, who "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief." Who are Abraham's seed? Why, they that trust as Abraham trusted, that exhibit a whole-hearted confidence in God, feeling that what he hath promised he is able also to perform. Oh souls, ye cannot have too much faith in God! You need never say, "May I believe?" It is altogether another question,—How dare you doubt your God?

"But is it true," says one, "that faith means trusting in God?" That is it. God bids you trust Jesus, and you shall be saved. Will you accept his testimony and trust Jesus? That is the whole of it. In common life we exhibit faith in man, and no one blames us for a legitimate trust. A man says that he has received a thousand pounds. How is that? He has nothing in his hand but a bank-note, and that is merely a bit of paper. Yet he is quite confident that he has the thousand pounds, because he has faith in the Bank of England and in its promises. That is my own mind as to God's promise: it is to me the thing which it promises, even as the note for £1,000 is a thousand pounds. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." If thou believest God as thou believest thy friend, thou art saved: for faith has brought thee into the state of salvation. But this is what men will not come to. They will stop and mutter and sputter, and spin all kinds of cobwebs, and invent all sorts of theories in order to evade the sweet necessity of trusting in the Lord. Simply and wholly to hang upon the bare arm of God and trust the merit of his Son, this is what they will not come to: for they are "a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith."

Furthermore, it is not unreasonable, but *it is highly reasonable, that God should take pleasure in faith.* Beloved, look at yourselves. Judge of the Lord from yourselves in this matter; for the Lord Jesus permits you so to judge of the Father's mind. You who are fathers, what would you say of your child if he did not believe your promise? If he said that he could not trust you, what would you think of him? If

your boy had offended, and refused to ask pardon because he would not believe that you would forgive him, what would be your judgment of his character? Would you be pleased with him if he would not confess that he was wrong, but took to sulking because he thinks you are unwilling to forgive? Would you take pleasure in such a child as that? No, but one of the beautiful things about your little children is just this, that they have not a thought or a care, but just trust you implicitly. They never question where Monday's dinner will come from—father has always found food; father will always do so. If you make them a promise of a treat on Saturday, see how they will jump for joy; though there is yet a week to come before that promise is to be fulfilled, yet they begin to live on the prospect of it, and they enjoy the pleasure a hundred times over by the expectation of it. They will ask you to-morrow whether it is not Saturday already. You are pleased that your children should trust you: it would be most unpleasant for you if they did not. When children have lost confidence in their parents, farewell to domestic peace. If you, being evil, love to be trusted, must it not be so with God? If you, a poor sinner, come and say, "Lord, I have greatly sinned, but I believe thou art such a greatly loving Father that thou canst blot it all out for Jesus' sake," do you not think that he will be pleased to hear your confidence? But he cannot be pleased with you when you say, "Lord, I know all about thy gospel and its blessings, but I really cannot trust thee!" Oh naughty words! Vile words! How can they look for favours who thus throw dirt into the face of God? How shall he bestow his grace on men who will not even believe him?

God will accept our faith, for it is in conformity with our position towards him. What position ought the creature to occupy to its Creator? Should it not constantly depend upon him? What position should a sinner occupy towards his Saviour? Should he not rely upon him most heartily? What position should a child of God occupy towards the divine Father but one of loving confidence?

Brethren, God loves faith because faith supplies the missing link between us and himself. If we cannot perfectly keep his law, as indeed we cannot, for we have already broken it, yet if we trust him our heart is right before him. The complete confidence of the heart is the essence of obedience, and the fountain of it. A servant who thinks evil of his master cannot be an acceptable servant to any man: he will be looking out for his own interests, and whenever they come across those of his master we know what will happen. But if, after having acted very crookedly, the man should have proof of his master's affection for him, and should come to the belief that his master is a model of goodness, then you have laid the foundation of another kind of service, such as no wages can purchase. From a loving trust there will proceed patience, diligence, zeal, fidelity, and obedience, and everything which is suitable in a servant towards a good master. So when a soul comes to make the Lord its trust it has set out upon the right track; and though it be but at the head of the way, yet it will make advances and arrive at no mean degree of rightness with God.

"Oh," saith one, "it seems such a small matter simply to trust." It may seem so, but within the compass of that little thing there lies a force whose power it would be difficult to measure. Every grace in

embryo lies within true faith. It is a virtue which contains within it seed enough to sow all the acreage of life with holiness. O my hearer, God blesses faith, therefore, I pray thee, render it to him. God hath put his curse on unbelief—oh may his Spirit help thee to shake thyself free of it this day!

III. My time has failed me, and therefore I must close by noticing, in the last place, this fact—that FAITH IS BLESSEDNESS. "Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust." To believe in God is to be blessed by God. "Oh, but," saith one, "I believe in God, and I am in great trouble." Just so, and within that trouble there dwells a measureless blessing. Your trial is the veil which covers the face of a loving God. Faith will make you to sing with the author of this psalm, "I waited patiently for the Lord." Faith says, "I am in deep trial, but all things work together for my good. It is therefore a great gain to me to be as I am. All these griefs and woes are but a heavenly surgery to cure me of the malady of inbred sin." This enables the believer to receive correction with patience. He knows that all is right, and therefore the child of God frets not, and does not kick against the pricks. As in the old days of surgery a brave man laid himself down and gave himself up to the knife, so does the believer resign himself to sharp affliction because he knows that it is necessary for his spiritual life, and will tend to his perfection in grace. Thus faith distils a potent medicine from poisonous plants, and extracts light out of darkness. Is not this enough to make a man blessed?

Faith, again, releases the afflicted out of trouble. Turn to the psalm again and read: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." If you are shut in by affliction like a man in a deep pit, and if instead of rising out of it by your exertions you only sink the lower, like one who struggles to rise out of miry clay, if you see no way of escape whatever, do not despair or resort to desperate means, or think hardly of God, but just pray and trust, and soon, like David, you shall bear witness to the blessedness of trusting. "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." The Lord knoweth how to deliver the righteous when they cannot guess how he will do it. Jehovah is not limited in ways and means. Is the Lord's arm waxed short? Trust in the Lord in the dark and he will bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday. Thousands of saints who have tried and proved the faithfulness of the Lord unite in chorus to declare that he hath delivered his people and will deliver them.

The man that maketh the Lord his trust is blessed because his faith creates in him a deep peace. It is responsibility which causes the wear and tear of life; at least, it is so in my case: now, he who trusts a matter with the Lord sees that the fulfilment of the promise lies with God and not with him. When we trust in the Lord we cease to worry, because it is the Lord's business to answer to our faith—

"'Tis mine to obey, 'tis his to provide."

He who takes the Lord for his guide no longer worries about the way; he who takes him for his Watchman rests in perfect peace; he who accepts him as a Saviour looks for sure salvation at his hands. There is a wonderful calm in the heart when we can commit our way unto the Lord; then we delight ourselves in the Lord, and he gives us the desires of our heart. That blessed act of casting every burden upon the Lord is faith's masterpiece, and it gives a sweet quietus to all care. To rest in perfect peace of mind is the best blessedness beneath the stars; and we have it, for we hear the Spirit say concerning all the people of God, "And the Lord shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him."

Now, suppose you and I were labouring to reach heaven by our own merits, then we might bid farewell to peace; for all the way we should be terribly afraid that we had not done enough, or suffered enough, or prayed enough, or repented enough. There is no rest upon that bed, for it is shorter than that a man may stretch himself on it. But "we which have believed do enter into rest." Jesus is our rest; in him we have peace with God. If I could make the Lord Jesus my trust and yet be lost I should be a great loser, but I should not lose so much as God would. How is that? I should lose my salvation, but the Lord would lose his glory, his truthfulness, his goodness; his gospel would be dishonoured, and his Son robbed of his reward. That cannot be. When a man trusts his money with a firmly-established bank, he does not sit up all night to protect his cash-box and iron-safe. No, his money is out of his own keeping, and he feels at ease about it. Thus we commit our body, soul, and spirit into the pierced hand of Jesus, who hath redeemed us, and we know and are confident that he is able to keep that which we have committed unto him until that day. None can know perfect rest of heart but those whose minds are stayed on God by a sincere trust in him.

Faith, in addition to bringing peace, creates a holy elevation of character, and that is blessedness. The man who lives by sight and walks according to the judgment of the flesh, is cabined and confined within a range too narrow for blessedness. He is not much above the brute that perisheth; his provender and stall are the main dependence of his joy; but the man that lives by faith ranges among eternal things, and drinks from celestial founts. His is a high, sublime, mysterious life. Is it not the life of God in man? I have compared the ascent of faith to climbing a succession of lofty stair-ways. Up from the depths we have already risen by no other means than faith in the Invisible. Not a single step before us can we see. Beneath, and around, clouds and darkness roll in enormous masses; the mist hangs thick over our nearer pathway. Like the world, which the Lord hangeth upon nothing, so our life has no visible dependence. We put down our foot on what seems thin as air, and behold, it is firm as a rock beneath us! Rising, ever rising, we tread from stair to stair, and are safe as the throne of the Eternal; but we never see more than one step at a time, and at times scarcely so much as that. Sight brings us no comfort, but faith fills us with delight; for above her head shines out clear as the sun the word of the immutable Jehovah.

"Ah," cries one, "I could not live with nothing to depend upon!"

Oh, my brother, is God nothing? Elijah had nothing to depend upon, for Cherith dried up, and the ravens came no more with bread and meat, and the widow woman had only flour enough for one more meal; yet the little meal in the barrel wasted not, and the cruse of oil never failed. He had nothing to depend upon but God, you know: that is to say, he had only everything. The believer has nothing to depend upon except his God, and what more does he want? What more could he have? Mark how yon heavens stand without a pillar! See how the round world floats in space without a stay! What more does the universe require than the power of the Eternal? O believer, get thee out into these deep waters, where there is sea-room for faith, and no weak creatures to interfere with unmingled reliance upon God; for blessed is that man whose life is rendered sublime by an undivided confidence in the living God.

Lastly, blessed is the believing man when he thinks of dying, for he is sure and certain that he cannot truly die. Faith has so linked him with the one living God that he feels immortality pulsing through his entire nature. When he comes to lie on the bed of sickness, and gradually decays, he has no fear of his departure; on the contrary, he looks forward with expectation to be delivered from the bondage and sinfulness of this mortal life, and to be admitted into the liberty and perfection of the life eternal. See him as he quits the shores of earth: he is not torn away by violence, forced unwillingly into an unknown hereafter. No, he undresses for his last rest, solemnly but expectantly. A song is on his lip, and glory is in his heart. He has finished his work, he has been washed from his sin, he has embraced the promise, and now he falls asleep upon the breast of his Redeemer, assured that he shall wake up in the likeness of his Lord. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

Oh, souls, if ye will believe, ye shall have both heaven on earth and heaven in heaven; but if ye will not believe your God, your Saviour, many sorrows shall be to you, and in the end you will destroy yourselves for ever. It matters not what excuses you make about this, or that, or the other; if you will not trust your God he will have nothing to do with you. If you cannot believe him, if you will make his Son to be false, he must say at the last, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." It cannot be otherwise. This shall make the great division between you and the righteous, that you believe not in him, while they have made the Lord their trust. If you believe in the Lord Jesus you shall be numbered with his chosen, and all his promises shall be fulfilled to you; for with you has he made an everlasting covenant which shall stand fast for ever and ever, when all visible things have melted away. May God uplift you from the miry clay of unbelief to the rock of confidence in him, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xl.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—192, 738, 685.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE CHILDREN AND THEIR HOSANNAS.

A Sermon,

DELIVERED ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, MAY 7TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT UNION CHAPEL, ISLINGTON.

(*By request of the Sunday-School Union.*)

"And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeased, and said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"—Matthew xxi. 15, 16.

THESE scribes and Pharisees always come in very conveniently as a sort of shadow to bring out the bright lights of the picture. One feels glad that they are not alive to worry us now, but somewhat glad that they were alive just then to put some of their queer cross-questions to the Saviour, and to arouse his spirit to utter precious truths, which are all the better understood because of the occasion which called for them. Here was their question, "Hearest thou what these say?" I suppose that if interpreted at full length the question means, "Dost thou permit these mere children to salute thee with hosannas? What dost thou think of thyself when thy name is in the mouths of noisy boys and girls who make the temple courts to ring again?" I have met with that spirit in these days, for the Pharisees are not all dead, nor the scribes either. They may be dead literally, but their spiritual successors, are they not still among us? Listen to their criticism,—"It is true that the good man has many converts, but they are only a parcel of young people, mere boys and girls." Oh yes; I know you, my old friend, I have met with you before! This is the very language of the ancestors of your house: they also enquired sarcastically,—"Hearest thou what these say?" A despising of true religion when it is found among the very young is a pernicious evil which springs up again in each generation however diligently we may pull up the weed.

Explanations are sometimes given of the light esteem in which men hold juvenile godliness: they say, "It is not the children's youth that we look down upon so much, but they are of course ignorant, and therefore do not know what they are saying." No doubt the Pharisees would have exclaimed, "They do not even know the meaning of the word 'hosanna'; and how can they know that it is proper to apply the term

to the man of Nazareth? They have never read the Talmud, or the Gemara: what should they know?" I have heard the same thing said of certain people in these modern times. The polite and intelligent, or rather, those who think themselves so, cry,—"Oh, it is a congregation of quite the lower orders. They are ignorant, uninstructed people. Very earnest, very prayerful, very sincere; but still so poor and illiterate that it takes a large quantity of them to make up anything very considerable." That judgment tallies with the criticism of the Pharisees of old; and I would recommend all friends to steer as far away as they can from the track of those ancient cavillers. The spirit which looks down upon any class of people who sincerely love the Lord is not from heaven, neither would the Lord Jesus sanction it for a moment. One is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren; and if some people do not know quite so much as we do, it is just possible that there may be a little conceit in our knowledge, and it were far more commendable to seek their edification than to sneer at them.

Then again, I suppose that the Pharisees would have said, "We do not condemn their youth or their ignorance, but their excessive enthusiasm is quite annoying. If they walked steadily through the court and chanted 'Hosanna' in a subdued tone, one could bear it; but to shout at that rate is going too far. These children cry 'Hosanna' in the temple in quite a tumultuous fashion. Everything should be decorous and proper there." Yes, yes, I have heard the same thing often; but there is not much in it. We can be overdone with propriety. Some of us are hampered and hindered by it; and in proportion as we get into that state we, of course, resent anything that looks like enthusiasm. No doubt, fanaticism is a bad thing; but it is the exaggeration of something which is good. When zeal grows to madness it is dangerous; but the stuff that it is made of, if it could be kept in order, might be just the one thing needful in many a church. Fire is a bad master. We all admit that. It is, however, an exceedingly good servant, and it would be a pity to quench all the fires that burn upon our hearths because perchance they might produce a conflagration. Enthusiasm is of God, let us not repress it because we are fearful that it may grow into fanaticism. Is not the very suggestion suspicious? It is so like what the Pharisees would have done. We are pretty sure to be on the down track when we say, "Hearest thou what these say?" I remember what Zwingle said in time of battle, and I have sometimes felt inclined to say the same, though I have not said it. He cried, "In the name of the Holy Trinity, let all loose." When we get contracted and official; when red tape and decorum tie us hand and foot, I feel inclined to cut the bonds, and let men and women shout and sing as they have a mind to. Especially let the children in the fervour of their spirits have full liberty to cry "Hosanna" in the temple and anywhere else. I demand liberty for life, and double freedom for young life, which will not else be fresh, and bright, and beautiful.

I have nothing more to do with that point just now. I was asked to speak on behalf of the Sunday-School Union, and I must make my discourse suitable to the occasion. I remember hearing a sermon preached on a missionary Sunday which was about everything in the world except missions. I believe the brother thought that as the Missionary

Society had the occasion, he needed not give it anything more, but might use the opportunity for discussing something else. Although I may seem to be somewhat confined in my run of thought, I cannot help it, I must keep the service sacred to its purpose. I have never learned the art of hitting two targets with the same shot. I must therefore keep to one theme and preach about the children, to those who are endeavouring to teach them the right way. It is upon the children that the brunt of this sarcastic question still falls, "Hearest thou what these say?" There are still among us those who hardly think that children can be truly converted. They put on their magnifying glasses when there is a child before the church, and they look hard for a flaw in its character! they put the child under a microscope and examine him much more particularly than they would a person of adult years. When the child is received into the church, it is with a kind of feeling that only the generous spirit of Christianity would enable us to be so wonderfully condescending, and so purely unselfish; for of course such young people cannot add much to the church, and it is by no means an occasion for killing the fatted calf, and beginning to eat and be merry. That spirit still lingers among us: I wish we could exterminate it!

The Saviour's answer to the Pharisees was splendid. Even in its opening words he smote them, "Have ye never read?" Why, they were always reading. They lived on the letter, and reckoned the reading of Scripture to be a very virtuous act. Reading and writing were the business of the scribes and Pharisees, and it hit them hard when the Saviour said to them, "Have ye never read?" Might he not even hint that they did not read after all. They were readers or nothing, yet the Saviour hints that they were not readers in the true sense. "Have ye never read?" You have never reached the inner sense. You have not read so as to understand. Have you never read that wondrous passage in the Psalms, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength"? It was well to carry the war into the enemy's country, and to charge them home in such a telling style; and they evidently felt it, for they made him no answer. Jesus, having silenced them, being satisfied that nothing could be done with them, left them and went to Bethany. They were barren ground given up to burning: it was useless to sow them with good seed. Jesus stopped their mouths, prevented their hindering the children, and then went his way to his village retreat.

That text which he quoted seemed to say to them,—God is most glorified in weak things. If praise shall come out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, then is God greatly honoured. If the heavens are telling of his glory, that is something; but if babes are doing it, that is somewhat more. There is more of power displayed in the Lord's raising up the weak things to confound the mighty than in his using the great things to set forth his majesty. It is very remarkable under the Old Testament dispensation what care the Lord always took of the poor and despised. There was an appointed gift for rich men; the offering was also arranged to suit persons of moderate position; but this was not all, the sacrifice was also accommodated to those of the humblest rank, so that the poorest woman might bring her pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. I think four times in one chapter in Leviticus we read, "He shall bring an offering of what he can get."

The Lord thus accepted the sacrifices of the poor; and we may rest assured that he accepts the offerings of the children. It is according to the spirit of our great Lord to dwell with the lowly and the humble, and to be pleased with the praises of the little ones. Others may despise them, but he never does, for he even enrols them in his kingdom.

And now to our work of dealing with this matter of questioning the blessedness of children's piety. May the Holy Spirit help me!

I. Our first head is this: CHILDREN ARE CAPABLE OF A VERYDEEP PIETY. Instead of saying, "Hearest thou what these say?" with a kind of contumely, we would cry with holy delight, "Lord, we know that thou hearest what the children say. If thou dost turn thine ear away from us by reason of our pollution, yet dost thou hear *their* simple cries and eager notes of praise, for they are true and hearty."

I am sure that children are capable of that early grace with which true religion usually begins, namely, that of deep *repentance*. Have you never heard the sobs and cries of little ones when they have been convinced of sin? I have almost wondered when I have seen their pure lives, and yet have marked their solemn sense of guilt. Outward sin in its grosser forms was scarcely known to them even by name; and yet when they have felt the power of God's Holy Spirit boys that were usually gay and thoughtless have sobbed and wept as if they could not be comforted, when they felt the evil of their hearts. They have mentioned their little deeds of disobedience to their parents, or their acts of passion with their brothers, or some other fault, and they have cried amain, as if their hearts would burst. Foolish persons have said, "Do not fret, my dear, I am sure you have never been a bad child;" but the child has known better. The conscience aroused within him has revealed to him much more of sin than the unrenewed trifler could perceive, infinitely more than the child ever showed in his outward life. I cannot help remembering how the Lord dealt with me as a child. If ever any lad knew the guilt of sin, I did. I was tenderly cared for, and kept from all sorts of evil company, yet the great deeps within my nature were broken up, and rose in vast waves of sin and rebellion against God, and I was amazed at my own sinfulness. I have met with scores of persons, converted in riper years, who, I am sure, never felt a hundredth part of what I felt as a child when I was under the hand of God's Spirit. I experienced a thorough loathing of myself, because I had not lived to God and loved and served him as he deserved. I speak upon this point what I do know, and testify what I have seen and felt in myself. Grief for sin and a holy dread of the consequences can be felt by children quite as well as by their seniors. In many children whom I have known, repentance has been true, thorough, deep, intelligent, and lasting: they have found their way to the foot of the cross, and seen the great sacrifice, and have wept all the more to think that they should have offended against the love which so freely forgives.

As to faith, I am sure that no one who has seen converted children will ever doubt their capacity for *faith*. In the hand of God's Spirit, a child's capacity for faith is in some respects greater than that of a grown-up person; at any rate, the faith of children is usually far more simple than that of adults. They take the word of God as they find it, and they believe it to be the very truth. They read it

fairly, and they do not put glosses thereon, or degrade it with interpretations gathered from the schools or from the current philosophies. God's book means to them just what it says. No undertone of doubt mars the music of the promises, but they accept the word as it ought to be accepted—as the sure testimony of God's mouth. They believe, and have little unbelief to struggle with: they believe and are sure, and, therefore, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

You must have noticed how vivid their faith is. The gospel is all fact to them, and they seem to see it before their eyes. They feel it and believe it, and in their childlike way they act upon it. They expect great things, and look for them in everyday life. They sometimes look for them in a shape in which they will never see them; but still that is much better than never to expect at all, and so to miss seeing the glory of God. Jesus is to children no mere character in history; he is with them, and their eye beholds him. The Master's word is to them what he meant it to be; and they expect to realize it and to see it fulfilled in their own experience: hence some holy children are far in advance of us poor questioners, who are cracking the nut while the little ones have eaten the kernel.

And how effective their faith is! Have you never known a child in whose holy life you have seen the reality of his faith? He was a child—God forbid that he should be otherwise—but he was a holy child. For a boy to put on the air and manners of a man is not sanctification; that is to spoil him, not to sanctify him. And for a girl to be other than a girl, and to assume the air and tone of her careful mother, would be very mischievous. God does not sanctify children into men, but he sanctifies children in their own childlike way. I have noticed especially the struggles of some children with whom it has been my great joy to converse. They have been to school, and they have met there with almost the same temptations which you encounter in business, on the market, or in the Stock Exchange, only the temptations have been adapted to their state, according to the subtlety of the evil one who knows how to fit his snares to the birds he would entrap. Converted children have a horror of wickedness. A bad word that they have heard has made them sob themselves to sleep. They have been disturbed by the look of sin, and some wicked thing that has been said about the divine Lord has cut them to the quick. They have not acted quite rightly, they have felt it, and they have not again been easy till they have mentioned it to mother or father, or perhaps to their teacher, and obtained a sense of forgiveness. The dear ones wanted to be clear with everybody, that they might not seem to be better than they were. Oh, the sweet simplicity of childhood! The dear child has said, "Jesus has forgiven me, I know. I stole away into a corner, and I told him that I had done wrong, but that I did love him; and I believe that he has even now blotted out my sin. I hope that I shall not do wrong again. Pray for me that I may be kept right, and may be pure and good, like the holy child Jesus." Does anybody here despise such desires in a child? If so, my friend, as far as it is right to do so, and perhaps a little farther, I despise *you*. I cannot help it, for there seems to me something so beautiful in youthful faith that you might as well sneer at a lily for its purity as despise a child for his artlessless. Children may teach some of us how to believe in

God. I am sure they may put us all to shame by their unfeigned confidence in the result of prayer. I have smiled at the story of the child who went to a prayer-meeting, which was summoned that they might pray for rain, *and took her umbrella with her.* Ah, but that is the marrow of true prayer. We pray, but we do not take our umbrellas; yet it is the essence of faith to expect to be heard and to be prepared to be answered. Children often remind us that faith is not to be a show thing, a theme for pious talk, a source of gracious emotion, but a matter-of-fact force, operating upon the ordinary concerns of everyday life.

I am sure that I am not wrong when I say that children are capable of repentance and of a very high degree of faith.

As to *love,* my dear friends, is it not one of the matters in which children excel? When they learn to love our blessed Lord, they copy closely the love of Mary of Bethany: they sit at his feet and receive his words. They are not Marthas yet, nor cumbered with much serving. I had almost said, "God grant that they may never grow to be such; but, having chosen the good part, may they keep to it, and still sit and look up into that dear face which they realize in all its beauty far better than we do." They do love Jesus, and there is no room to question the fact! The Lord never said to a child, "Lovest thou me?" He did say it to Peter, and there was good reason for his doing so; but a child once becoming a disciple of Christ is sure to love with a pure heart fervently. Childhood is all heart.

I have noticed in children other virtues besides these, when they have been brought to Christ. For instance, *courage.* We do not always look for that in children, yet they have shown it. This was seen conspicuously when the martyr Laurence was burned at Colchester. The Popish tormentors had so tortured him in prison that he had to be carried to the stake in a chair, and all the grown-up people were afraid that they might be burned too if they were seen to associate with him; but the little children had no such fears, and so they came round the man of God and cried, "Lord, strengthen thy servant! Lord, strengthen thy servant!" So they were his comforters while he confessed his Lord amid the flames. When one was burned in Smithfield, a boy was seen going home after the burning; and some one said, "Boy, why were you there?" He answered, "Sir, I went to learn the way." Those were brave days surely, when boys learned the way to witness for Jesus at the stake. Yet they were children, you know, and children like ours. The Brentwood martyr was a holy boy of whom one said to his mother, "Will you not urge him to forsake the faith?" She said, "I have had many children, but I never thought one so well bestowed as this dear boy, though he is to be burned to the death; seeing it is for the Lord Jesus." He cheered his older companion who stood back to back with him in the flames, and then he died unflinchingly. Children have taken their fair share all along in martyr days. Read the old stories of church history. When the good ship of the church ploughed her way through seas of blood, the children on board bravely endured their share of the tempest and the tossing. Grace made them heroes before nature had fully made them men.

So, to come nearer to your own hearts. There is another grace which is akin to courage, but more often required by children now,

and that is *patience*. Oh, the patience of pious children! I have known one lie for years upon his back, the most cheerful person in the house. He could never stir: by the order of the doctor he was forced to lie in one position; but never a murmur escaped his lips. You must have seen children behave splendidly when they have had to go to the hospital, or to undergo a painful operation. They have resigned themselves to the great Father, and they have trusted in Jesus in a way that must have made you blush; certainly, if you have been guilty of impatience yourself you must have felt reproved.

Oh, dear friends, I plead for the children's piety with all my heart; for I am sure that they are capable of being *quick of understanding* in the fear of the Lord. They are not necessarily ignorant, nor even shallow. It has been my great privilege of late to admit to the church a large number of little children, and I have done so with unreserved confidence in their intelligent apprehension of the gospel. I have talked with them, I hope with gentleness; but I have put questions to them concerning the deep things of God; and wherever the question has been vital there has been no hesitancy as to the answer. I had years ago a good brother in our number who at church-meeting usually felt it necessary to ask a young child some testing question. I did not admire his habit, but I thought he would grow out of it, as indeed he did. He asked this question of a child,—"Have you a good heart?" It was a little boy, and he at once replied, "Yes, sir." My friend looked at me as much as to say, "There, you see the child's ignorance!" I knew better, and therefore said to the boy, "What do you mean when you say that you have a good heart?" "Sir," he said, "the Lord Jesus Christ gave me a new heart when I believed in him, and I am sure that it is a good one." My venerable friend who put the question was greatly delighted, but completely shut up: he asked no more questions of children for a very considerable time. If he had done so, I might have had more good illustrations to give you.

It is not true that godly children come into the church believing something or other, not knowing what; for I have marked a maturity of understanding in some children that, I am sure, I have not always seen in persons of riper years. God instructs the babes; he teaches the young men wisdom; he gives the youths knowledge and discretion. Age is wise, undoubtedly, but not always; youth is foolish, but yet the Lord grants a considerable share of wisdom to young Samuels and youthful Davids. Frequently, also, what they know is truer wisdom than that of their elders. I read some time ago that the Jews permit children to read the Scriptures when they are five years old, but they may not read a word of the Talmud till they are fifteen. God help me to keep on reading the Scriptures, and never get to the Talmud at all. Alas, many professors are so old that it is all Talmud with them; the Bible is buried under a heap of novel theories. With the children there is no Talmud and much Bible. They just keep to the simple word, and what they know is worth the knowing; whereas much of what others of us know never was worth the knowing, and it would be a great blessing if we could forget it altogether. Children can be quick of understanding in the fear of God.

If you inquire for anything else, Can children know *joy in the Lord?*

Oh, can they not? Would God we had their joy and their delight in divine things. Have you ever seen them on the brink of death, when they have been within hail of heaven? when the golden gate has been in sight? What words they have uttered, priceless as rare gems! A half-a-dozen words from a dying child have been worth a Bodleian for the weight of meaning that has been concentrated therein. If their heavenly Father can bless them in dying, he can bless them in living with joy unutterable; and so indeed he does.

One thing strikes me very strongly about children—that, when men grow old and ripen for heaven, they usually enter upon a child-like career before they die. Their mature tastes and purified hearts bring them into a childhood which is not childish but child-like. Where childhood begins ripe manhood ends. The last words that were said by old Dr. Nott were,—

> "And now I lay me down to sleep,
> I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

A child's verse that his mother taught him served him for a watchword at the gates of death. It is very pleasing to read of our late dear friend Dr. Guthrie, that, just before his departure, he said, "Sing me one of the bairns' hymns." Oh, yes, when we become old we grow like children again; we want the bairns' hymn and the bairns' faith. The child is in some respects our model and example. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." What need of more argument as to the excellence of child religion?

II. But now, secondly, as children are capable of deep piety, so CHILDREN ARE CAPABLE IN THE HANDS OF GOD OF RENDERING GOOD SERVICE. Some children have been chosen for very special service: not many, but some. It would prove the capacity of a child if there were but one Samuel. He ministered before the Lord, and thus was a child-priest. He spoke the word of the Lord to Eli, having received it in a vision of the night, and thus was a child prophet. He was a messenger of God when Eli's sons were men of Belial.

Little children can, and often do, convey healing messages to those about them. The little maid that waited upon Naaman's wife did good service to the Syrian hero when she said, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." Little children, I have no doubt, often guide blind souls into the light, and even great believers have been indebted to children. Can we ever forget Samson, that brawny, strong-sinewed man, who became blind as the result of his own folly? He could not serve his God without the help of a boy, and therefore, he said to the lad that held him by the hand, "Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them;" and the boy led the blind hero to the place where, bowing himself with all his might, he avenged his blindness upon the Philistines. How often strong men have been guided to great actions by a child! Most of you can remember times when to you, also, it was true, "A little child shall lead them." You had not thought of it, had not the boy suggested it to you. You could

not have done it aforetime; but somehow the word he said, as he looked up archly into your face, quickened you to energy. A Christian man had never set up family prayer, but his little boy went to visit an uncle, and when he came back he said, "Father, why do you not do as uncle Isaac does?" "What is that, child?" "Why, he reads a chapter every morning and every evening, and prays with his family." Father attended to family worship after that. The child's remark was a great help. You may have beheld a scene like that which comes up to my memory:—At a temperance meeting a drunkard came in with a little boy whom he greatly loved, and both of them listened to the speeches. The little boy, turning round, said, "Father, do not drink any more. Come up to the platform and let us both sign the pledge." "That I will, child." Putting the boy on his shoulders, he forced his way through the crowd, and they both signed, and put on the blue. He was true all his life to it,—nay, he became a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ after being saved from his drunkenness. Oh, little children, you have done much, and you will do more. We cannot, therefore, thrust you away, and say to our Master, "Hearest thou what these say?" God forbid that we should.

Little children serve the Lord wondrously by their *prayers*. There are no prayer-meetings to my mind more touching, or more likely to prevail, than the prayer-meetings of little children when they get together and cry unto the Lord. Melancthon thought so, for he said to Luther, when he found him down in the dumps, "Courage, brother, the children are praying for us, and God will hear them." Mr. Whitefield mentions in his diary the great encouragement that he received at Moorfields from the children. He says that he was pelted with mud and stones, but he was greatly comforted, for a company of little children always sat around the platform and passed him up the requests for prayer. When mud and stones fell fast about them they never stirred, but still kept looking up to the man of God, and offering their prayers that God might help him. The Lord God will hear children: he heareth young ravens when they cry, will he not much more hear the young of the human race? That perfect praise which he brings out of their mouths he must accept, for he has himself put it there. He will accept their childish pleadings: blessings must descend when children pray.

The children of London, I do verily believe, are the best city missionaries that we have, and the best evangelists that we shall ever find. They come to our schools, and everything is happy and holy there; but they often go home to houses from which they have been sent to get rid of them, and for no better reason; but when they go home what do they do? If you were to turn a singing pilgrim, and visit certain homes with the wish to sing gracious hymns, the door would be shut in your face. But little Tommy will sing at home, and father will say, "Come and sing me one of your little pieces"; for in his opinion Tommy's voice is much sweeter than yours. And little Ruth, when she goes home, tells her father what her teacher said. Father does not care for parsons, and he does not believe in religion; but then, you see, he is very fond of Ruth, and Ruth prattles so prettily that he loves to listen to her, and even tells his mates what she says. Even her

breakings down and her lispings are pretty to him; his heart must be impressed now that Ruth sings to him. In many hundreds of cases it has been so. When children are converted, they do more than sing and tell what they have heard. I heard of a little child whose father was wont to curse and swear, and when he had indulged in a fit of horrible language, she went behind the door in terror. Her father fiercely demanded, "What are you doing there? Come out." When she came out her eyes were red with weeping. "What are you crying for, child? What are you crying for?" "Because, dear father, I could not bear to hear you swear!" "Well, child, you never shall hear me swear again. Mother, I think that child goes to a good school. What school is it? I must go and hear the minister." How many cords of love God is binding about hearts by means of the children from our Sabbath-schools!

If you ever become weary in teaching, because you think you are not doing much, do recollect that you do not know how much you are doing. You are teaching the children, but you are also teaching the fathers and the mothers, and through them the word is entering where none of us can go. God will bless the word which the children carry home. They are capable of great service, even as children. Therefore do not pray that they may be converted when they grow up, but pray that they may be converted while they are children. Pray that while they are yet little ones they may be spiritually girded with a linen ephod, and may spend their earliest days in the house of the Lord.

III. Lastly, lest I weary you, the third head shall be this: CHILDREN'S PIETY AND SERVICE ARE PECULIARLY GLORIFYING TO GOD.

It glorifies God's *condescension* when he takes a little child and instructs it in his fear, and manifests himself to it as he does not unto the world. I have heard some speak of condescending to children. Oh, brothers! we go up when we talk to children. It is almost condescension on the little children's part to consort with such poor creatures as we are. But for *God* to stoop to children is indeed wonderful. His great condescension is seen in the nursery and the infant class.

So, too, I think is his *sovereignty*—that while he permits the wise of this world to be foolish in their wisdom, and not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are called, he has chosen the weak things of this world. I feel deep sympathy with our blessed Lord to-night, while I say, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." He passes the towers of haughty princes, and he comes down to accept a babe kneeling at its mother's knee, and there works a miracle of grace. He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he wills to give that mercy to children. Condescending sovereignty takes a child from its little cot and leads it to the eternal throne.

And, oh, what *power* is manifested in the conversion of a child! Perhaps that did not strike you. I will tell you how it may strike you. If you have any doubt about it, will you kindly try to convert a child yourself? There are teachers here, perhaps, who have performed the experiment. You have found yourselves baffled at every point. You find the little sinner as hard to subdue as the greatest rebel on earth.

You find the same unbelief in its little heart as in your own, though it takes its own peculiar form. There, too, you see the same waywardness, the same fickleness, after their own form and fashion. You find the same hardness of heart, the same forgetfulness, the same carelessness, the same indifference in a child as in those who are grown up. For a child to become a saint is a mighty instance of divine power, as you will say after you have once tried to make your child into a saint by your own endeavours. The wisest and tenderest efforts, apart from divine grace, must end in utter failure; and therefore when God works the miracle let his name be praised.

By the conversion of little children the Lord gets to himself much glory, because they so admirably rebuke his enemies. Do I address any man who has not yet given his heart to God? You will be rebuked, I am sure, if you find that your children have done so. I know fathers now whose children, though they are but little, pray for them every day, saying, "God save dear father." I know mothers who gather their little children about them, and they pray together for father: perhaps father is very kind, but yet not a Christian; or else father is cruel when he is intoxicated, and they are all afraid when he enters the house in such a state. Oh, how they pray for father that he may come home sober! The prayers of the mothers and the children are bringing the fathers and the husbands to Christ; for who can see what some of us have seen in children and not feel ashamed of living so long in opposition to the Redeemer's love?

Ay, and I may add, I think, that children sometimes rebuke God's own people, and so glorify God. Some of God's people here to-night have never made a confession of their faith. What would you think if I introduced six children to you whom I saw one after another last week, and who all came forward with eagerness to say, "We have been washed in the blood of Jesus, and we want to join his church." I said, "Come along, my children; I am glad to see you." When I talked with them, and heard what God had done for them, I had great confidence in proposing them to the church. I have not found young converts turn back. I usually find that these young ones who are introduced early to the church hold on, and become our best members. Do not refuse to receive them, lest it should ever happen to you as it did to one who was cruelly prudent. A child had loved the Saviour for some two or three years, and she desired to make a confession of her faith. She begged of her mother that she might be baptized. The mother said that she thought she was too young. The child went to bed broken-hearted, and in the morning a great tear stood in her eye. She had joined the church triumphant above! Do not let your child ever have to complain of you that you will not believe in its truthful love to Jesus. Do you expect perfection in a child before it joins the church? Then I hope you are perfect yourself, and, if you are, pray go to heaven, because I am sure you will fall to quarrelling with everybody here on earth. Few of the perfect people are agreeable neighbours; I suppose they are so good that they have no patience with us who are not up to their standard. No, dear friend, a converted child will give you evidences of true religion, not of perfect religion, for that you ought not to expect. Let the child avow its faith in Christ, and, if you have not confessed

him yourself, stand rebuked that a child is ready to obey its Lord while you are not.

Dear Sunday-school teachers, allow me to congratulate you upon the blessed work in which you are engaged. It is very hard work if you do it thoroughly, especially to you who are busy all the week, and really want the Sabbath for rest. You teach the children while suffering from a headache, and they do not always behave as you would wish; but pray work on for poor London's sake, for the church's sake, and for Christ's sake, and for the children's sakes. I put that in last because it has most to do with my sermon. Labour on for the children's sake. Do, for the love of them, never give up Sunday-school teaching. "Oh, but I am getting into middle life!" Do you think that Sunday-school teaching ought to be done by nobody but boys and girls? "Oh, but I have done enough!" It is a mercy for you that the sun does not say that he has done enough, or else he would not shine to-morrow; or that God and his Christ do not say they have done enough. What would become of you if the Lord ceased blessing you? We are wanting Sunday-school teachers almost everywhere in London. Our people who get on in the world are too respectable to teach children. What a wretched pride is this! Those who talk so are disreputable creatures; I am sick of them! In America, a president has taught a Sunday-school: it was to his honour. In England chancellors and prime ministers have thought such service no disgrace. Let queens and princes teach Sunday-school; it shall be for their renown. If you are the most wealthy man in London you are the person who should take a class; that is to say, if you are a true Christian. You of knowledge, you of understanding, you of intelligence, you should come to encourage the rest. Do not leave this sacred service to our second-best people. I do not say that you have done so; but do not begin to move in that direction. Let those who know most, teach most; and let those who have grown most in Christ themselves be most earnest that others should grow up in his fear.

If you love my Master I leave this subject with you in fullest confidence. If not, I do not ask you to attempt to teach what you do not know. Jesus does not say to Judas or to Pilate, "Feed my lambs;" but he does say it to you, Peter, because you can say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxviii. 1—35.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OUR SANCTUARY.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 15TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters. Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise."—Jeremiah xvii. 12, 13, 14.

THIS book of Jeremiah is a very thorny one: it might be called, like his smaller work, "The Book of Lamentations." Our text is as a lily among thorns, as a rose in the wilderness; the solitary place shall be glad for it, and the desert shall rejoice. The words sound like sweet music amid the crash of tempest. The bitter tree yields us sweet fruit. The weeping prophet wipes away our tears. I do not know that the whole of Scripture contains more delightful promises than those which fell from the lips of this son of sorrow, who has been to so many a son of consolation. May God grant that this lily to-day may be exceeding lovely in your eyes as you see it in the sunlight of the Holy Spirit.

It seems to me that in this passage the mourning prophet is sitting alone in communion with his God, speaking out his steadfast faith, and washing the feet of his sorrows in the laver of the promises. The singular change of the pronoun from *thee* to *me* shows how near the Lord was to him; so near, indeed, that Jehovah not only speaks by the prophet, but breaks in with personal language, and speaks himself. All men who have to deal with great multitudes of people for God must be much alone, or they will lose their power. Jeremiah was sick at heart, for he prophesied but he was not believed; he entreated and persuaded, but his affectionate appeals were rejected; he saw the nation hastening to destruction, and he could not avert the doom: all this made him cry out in the anguish of his soul, "I am the man that hath seen affliction." Hence he could not have lived if he had not found sanctuary in his God. He often stole away into secret places that he might pour out his breaking heart before the Lord, and commit himself to the tender care of him whom he so faithfully served. Let us imitate him, and overcome our griefs by secret fellowship with the happy God.

The passage before us is a very broken one. Those who are acquainted

with the original tongue will tell you that it is difficult to construe it. It is a fragmentary passage, and several meanings have been given to it. Do you not know the reason of this? Should not a broken heart use broken words? When have you been in great trouble, and have drawn nigh to God, you have often had to pour out your heart in faltering accents. Nor does this destroy our prayer, or even shorten its power. Our God can put our speech together when we cannot put it together ourselves. A sigh here and a cry there, an utterance of faith at one moment and a groan of sorrow at the next: these make up a singular patchwork to ourselves, perhaps; more singular still to anyone who should overhear us in our solitary sighs; but such supplications are not at all singular to God. He reads the meaning of his saints, and understands the language of their sighs. However, it seems to me that the translators of the Authorised Version have given us the true meaning of the original, as I think they generally do. The men are not yet born who will give us a better rendering either of the Old or the New Testament than is to be found in our old English Bibles, and it is my belief that they never will be born. These men wrote a marvellously pure English, and really translated the Bible into our mother tongue, being helped of God not only to see the meaning, but to write it in words which are understood of the people. Learned men in our day for the most part know every tongue except English; and they fall into the error of mistaking long Latinized words for our native language. Give me plain expressive Saxon. You may place every confidence in your grandmother's Bible; whatever small improvements the translation may require, it is in the main so good that its rivals have had but short lives, while it retains all its primitive power.

In this text no doubt the prophet had in his eye the temple at Jerusalem. Seated upon the summit of a hill, with deep valleys surrounding it, the temple stood aloft, above all, a noble structure, seen from afar. To the Jew it was "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth." When God dwelt in it the temple might be fitly described in the language of Jeremiah as "A glorious high throne" for God. That glittering temple of snow-white marble, adorned with abundance of gold, seemed as it gleamed in the sun to be the lofty seat of Jehovah, whereon he reigned in the midst of his people. The temple, I say, may have been in the prophet's eye, but I do not think that it was in the heart of his meaning. The passage which we read just now, in the seventh chapter of Jeremiah, shows you that Jeremiah was by no means a devotee for the material temple, nor did he rest his confidence in its outward ceremonial. He had reached a more spiritual region. That evangelical spirit which spake by Isaiah also rested upon Jeremiah. He had come to understand that God is not to be worshipped as if he dwelt in temples made with hands, nor to be served by merely outward rites; but that God is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. It seems to me to be clear that the prophet here speaks of God himself as being to his people the place of their sanctuary and a glorious high throne. With this I shall begin,—*the true place of our sanctuary.* Secondly, I shall have a little to say about *the departers from God*, the true place of our sanctuary,—they are to be ashamed, and written in the dust. Then, thirdly, *the comers to God as the true sanctuary.* How do

they come? They come with the language of the fourteenth verse; "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved."

I. First, let us consider THE TRUE PLACE OF OUR SANCTUARY. It is not at Jerusalem, nor yet at Samaria; it is not at Rome, nor yet at Canterbury. The place of our sanctuary is not the meeting-house wherein we gather; the place of our sanctuary is our God himself. "God is our refuge and strength." "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations."

He is viewed under the aspect of *a sovereign reigning in majesty*—"A glorious high throne is the place of our sanctuary." Many refuse to worship God as reigning: they have not yet grasped the idea that the Lord is King, so that they cannot understand the song, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice." For that includes, first, divine sovereignty, and some men grow black in the face with rage against that truth; they cannot endure it. Not even over his own mercy will they allow God to exercise any sovereignty: he is to be bound by their rules and compelled to deal alike with all; so they say. But he will not have it so; for this is his word: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." The crown rights of God include this amongst the rest, that he hath the power of life and death, and can punish or pardon according to his royal pleasure. While he will deal justly with all mankind, yet he hath a special favour towards his chosen, passing by their iniquity through the sacrifice of Calvary. He will make his own election, and he will distribute his mercy as seemeth good in his sight. To all who rebel against this sovereignty he makes this answer: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" When any cavil at his acts, his only answer is: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Now this God whose sovereignty is so much disputed is our God; a glorious high throne for absolute dominion and sovereignty is the place of our sanctuary. To him whose sovereign grace is the hope of the undeserving we fly for succour.

Besides sovereignty, of course, his glorious high throne includes power. A throne without power would be but the pageantry of vanity. There should be power in the King who ruleth over all: and is there not? Who shall stay his hand, or say unto him, "What doest thou?" God is ruler even at this hour. The floods lift up their voices, yea, the great waves of the raging sea roar in their pride, but "the Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever." Hallelujah. Do not imagine that Jehovah has vacated his throne or left the affairs of his kingdom to chance, or to the free-will of man. Whatever you think you see of chance has an underlying order about it which shows that God is there: whatever you see of man's free agency, and you do see it, yet over it and above it there is the overruling hand of him that worketh all things according to the counsel of his will. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." Oh, it is such a blessed thing to me that the place of our sanctuary is the reigning God, as long as he is on the throne it must be well with the righteous. Oh, but they say, evil reigneth. Yes, but God reigneth over the evil,

and through the evil still produces good. Do not imagine that Satan is an independent power, a sort of second Deity, outside of the dominion of the Lord, for even he is subordinated to the eternal purpose. "Alas," cries despondency, "sorrow reigneth, and the effect of the curse!" I know it; but the Redeemer also reigneth, lifting up his people from that curse; and the creation itself also, which has been made subject to vanity, shall be delivered, and rise into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Wherefore, rejoice in this, that the Lord reigns as absolute monarch, full of power to execute his own purposes of infinite love. In all times of disturbance and trouble flee ye to the Lord of all as to a sanctuary, and find your comfort in him.

Forget not that *the Lord reigns in exceeding glory.* The excellence of his dominion surpasses all other, for he is the blessed and only Potentate. Every act of his empire exhibits his glorious character, his justice, his goodness, his faithfulness, his holiness. Other kings need the tinsel of pomp, and the trickery of policy to make them great, but the Lord God is essentially glorious, and those who know him best are most struck with his grandeur. The chronicles of Jehovah's kingdom are honourable and glorious, the forces of his throne are infinite, the purposes of his majesty are holy, and his name is to be praised from generation to generation. We shelter beneath no insignificant princedom —a glorious high throne is the place of our sanctuary.

The text teaches more than this, however. It says, "A glorious high throne *from the beginning* is the place of our sanctuary." It is a very blessed thing to come back to the fact that the Lord has not newly assumed a throne, from which he has newly cast out some former king. Nay, "A glorious high throne *from the beginning* is the place of our sanctuary." As his is the most potent of empires, so is it the most ancient. There was a time before all times when there was no day but the Ancient of Days, and then God was supreme, purposing, determining, counselling, arranging all things according to the good pleasure of his will. "With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him?" Then there came a day when he had created worlds, I know not how many, but in them all he found no rival. Perhaps all the stars we see are worlds full of inhabitants who worship the infinite Creator, and perhaps all the stars that have ever been seen by the telescope are to the whole universe of God as a little dust behind the door might be to a large room. But in all these worlds from the beginning the Lord is a glorious high throne. When he made this world and put man upon it, he did not make it without a plan and a purpose from the beginning. He never lifted his finger upon any work of his hand without first knowing what he was going to do, and what would come of it. God is never taken by surprise, he has foreseen all things and worked them into his grand plan. The arrangements of providence which seem so complex to us are not complex to him; they are simple, direct, and effective. God is working evermore for a glorious purpose, which shall one day make the universe and all eternity to sing with rapturous joy that ever God determined to do what he is now doing. Let us rest in that truth. From the beginning a glorious high throne ordained everything, and it arranges all things to-day: this is the place of the sanctuary of God's people. Oh, be ye not cast down and troubled, for the Lord

reigneth: beneath his royal pavilion we may rest in peace. There is evil and there is sorrow, there is sin and there is bold rebellion; but infinite goodness is still regnant upon the throne of glory. Be ye not worried as though truth would be defeated by falsehood, and goodness would be exterminated by evil; for the Lord of holiness wears the crown, and he will break the hosts of wickedness with his sceptre, as with a rod of iron. A glorious high throne, higher than the throne of Satan, higher than the heights of pride, higher than the loftiness of ambition, higher even than the heaven of heavens, is still the throne of God for ever and ever, and this is the refuge of all his saints. The Lord hath graciously said of his people, "Although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary"; and he has also said, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary."

When the prophet alludes to *the place* of our sanctuary, our mind is naturally led to feel that there must be some kind of place where God especially reveals himself. We all know that he manifests himself in heaven; and we expect ere long to be there to swell the number of his courtiers; but he has also revealed himself on earth, and very significant are the places where he has done so. The place where he mainly revealed himself among men was the temple, to which I have said Jeremiah somewhat alludes. Now, where was the temple built? It was built upon that mountain whereon Abraham took his son Isaac to offer him up as a sacrifice. Wonderful scene! There, all in lonely quietude, the servants left at the foot of the hill, the great patriarch, the father of the faithful, laid the wood upon the altar and unsheathed the knife to slay his only son. There the scene ends, and the curtain drops; but what a wonderful picture it was of the greater Father, the everlasting God, who did in very deed and truth offer up his Son, the heir of the promise, that we might live through him! A ram caught in the thicket was the substitute for Isaac; but there was no substitute for Jesus, the Son of God. He died the just for the unjust to bring us to God. But there, where the most instructive of all types of the heavenly Father's love was exhibited, there must be the temple wherein God would converse with men and make for men a place of sanctuary. The temple itself was built upon that site, and there it was that God dwelt visibly between the wings of the cherubim, above the ark of the covenant, over that golden lid which was called the mercy-seat. What was that ark of the covenant, but a type of our Lord Jesus Christ in a most instructive way? There stood the cherubim above the golden lid of that coffer; and Jesus also was "seen of angels." The cover made the mercy-seat, or propitiatory, and this the Lord Jesus is to us. He, as the blood-besprinkled mercy-seat, is the place where God meets with us, hears our prayers, and accepts our persons and our praises. Look within the lid with holy reverence, and first you see two tables of stone upon which the law of God was engraven. Did not Jesus say, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart"? Looking again, you observe a golden pot filled with manna, and you remember him who is the bread which came down from heaven, whereof if a man eat he shall live for ever. Nor may we fail to notice a rod, a rod that has budded and blossomed and brought forth almonds; for by it we are reminded that the sceptre of rule is

with the Lord Jesus Christ, and the government shall be upon his shoulder. This is his living and productive sceptre, with which he rules the souls of his people. Do you wonder that the Lord in meeting his people ordained as the trysting place such an eminent type of his dear Son? The ark of the covenant was made according to the pattern which Moses saw in the holy Mount; and above its mercy-seat was the place where God dwelt, and where he communed with his people.

But the sacrifice of Isaac and the ark of the covenant were only types of that greater sacrifice when he who is the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, went up to the cross, and on Calvary "it pleased the Lord to bruise him." It is natural that the Lord should meet with us in grace in the place where he put his Son to grief. There, where he made his soul an offering for sin, the Lord becomes well pleased with us. O friends, the cross is the place where God hath his throne of salvation, and truly we may say of it—"A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary." In the great plan of salvation by the sacrifice of the Son of God, God is indeed enthroned. Upon the cross he is extolled and made very high. Would you see his majesty? Behold, it in the person of the Only Begotten, full of grace and truth. Would you see his justice? Read it written in crimson lines upon the dying person of the Son of God. Would you see his love? Ah, I will not speak of it, but simply say—Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us! In giving us his own dear Son, he has glorified his grace by an unspeakable gift. God is never so revealed in all the works of his hands as in the cross of Christ. That is a glorious high throne indeed. Its moral excellence, its infinite love, its spiritual beauty, can never be equalled. Earthly kings and princes often rule by injustice, breaking the laws which they pretend to make; but he, our God, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, is lifted high, high above all censure as to his justice, his holiness, his grace, his truth, his love. "A glorious high throne is the place of our sanctuary."

Now then, dear friends, *the place where we worship is God himself revealed in the person of his dear Son.* I pray you, never try to worship anywhere else. Christ is the one altar, the one temple, the one sanctuary. Set not up your high places of will-worship; erect not images to Baal in the form of self and sin. God in Christ Jesus should absorb all the worship of all the sons of men.

In addition, *the Lord God is our refuge;* for a sanctuary was a place to which men fled in the hour of peril. Is not Jesus our refuge from present guilt and from the wrath to come? Does he not deliver us from the guilt of sin? Ay, he is our refuge from temptation, our refuge in the hour of trial, our sanctuary in every season of sorrow, distress and pain. This glorious high throne affords us an abiding shelter under the assaults of the enemy. I do not think I can preach on such a text,—so there I must just leave it for you to think it over, or, better still, for you to flee to it, and fleeing to it to abide in it, worshipping in spirit and in truth.

II. Secondly, I am to speak but a few words, but those very solemnly, concerning THOSE WHO DEPART FROM GOD. Alas, that there should be such!—men who leave the river for the desert, the living for

the dead! *Who are they?* The text says, "All that forsake thee," and "they that depart from me." See, then, that this text has a bearing upon us, because these people of whom we are now going to speak were not an ignorant people who did not know God, or how could they be said to forsake him? They were not like the heathen who have never heard his name. You cannot forsake a person with whom you have no acquaintance. They were a people who knew a great deal about God, since he had given them his law and sent his prophets among them. They were the people of Israel: God had dwelt among them: in open type and visible glory he had been in the midst of their host; they had seen the sacrifice, they had beheld the great wonders which the Lord wrought for them in Egypt and at the Red Sea; and yet they forsook him. Alas! there are among his own professed people a company that forsake him. They mix for a time with the people of God, but they ultimately go out from them because they are not truly of them. In this land we have a people to whom God has been very gracious in sending the gospel to them; but they are forsaking Christ for Rome, turning aside from faith in the Redeemer's merit that they may trust in priest-craft. It will not do, my brethren, it will not do. But there are many such, and many that did run well for a time; what did hinder them that they should not still obey the truth? They went back to the world for gain or for ease: because of poverty, or because of riches, or because of fear of man, they turned aside and went away from God. We still sorrowfully know that an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God remains amongst us. Those who forsake the Lord are not an infidel people altogether, they are not a people who refuse even to hear his name; but their hearts are not right with Jehovah, neither are they steadfast in his covenant. At one time evidently these people had something to do with the Lord, but after awhile they forsook him. What did they do? They no longer sought unto the Lord as once they did, but ceased to be fervent in their service. At first they ceased to worship him, they took no delight in his ways; they tried to be neutral, they were lukewarm, careless, indifferent, they forgot God. After thus declining in zeal, and refusing outward worship, they went further; for he says they had departed from him—they could not endure the Lord, and therefore went into the far country. They said unto God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." They went into open sin; they disowned their God and broke his commands: some of them even dared to blaspheme him. The course of sin is downhill. The man who once forgets his God soon forgets himself; and then he throws the reins on the neck of his lusts and goes from sin to sin, forgetting his God more and more. I may be addressing such this morning; I fear I am. To such I have to tell *what will become of them* one of these days. This will become of you,—you "shall be ashamed." I do not know a more painful feeling to a true man than to be ashamed, when he feels—"I was foolish and wrong": it makes his cheeks crimson, his heart swells, his eyes overflow. The most hardened of sinners will one day be ashamed, saying, "I acted unprofitably to myself." Such shame will come over you forgetful ones one of these days. You that live without God will ere long be disgusted with yourselves for it. It may not come upon you till you die, but it

is very probable that it will assail you then. When in your dying hours, what a dreadful thing it will be to be filled with shame at the remembrance of the past, so as to be afraid to meet your God, ashamed to think that you have lived a whole life without caring for him! What will it be to wake up in the next world and to see the glory of God around you—the glory of the God whom you despised! Oh, the shame that will come over the ungodly in judgment! It is written, "They shall wake up to shame and everlasting contempt." Every intelligent being that is right towards God will despise the man that forsook God and turned away from him. "They shall wake up to shame and everlasting contempt." What a waking! It is as terrible as our Lord's word, "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." How fearful to think that the contempt will never end! Everlasting contempt! What a word! I hope you have never acted so as to feel ashamed before your fellow-men; for it must be a dreadful thing when such a charge is brought against a man that he has to appear before the judgment-seat of his own country, and knows that he is guilty. He has only his fellow-men to face; but what a hang-dog look he has! He cannot face the the jury; he is afraid to cast his eyes upon the judge! He is ashamed to be seen even by the meanest wretches in the court. In the next world there will be none of that hardihood which enables big villains to brazen it out before their neighbours. Conscience will be awakened then, and therefore shame will have all the greater power. Great men and proud men will be small enough ere long; and careless and profane persons will be miserable enough when that word shall be fulfilled—"All that forsake thee shall be ashamed."

And then it is added that they "shall be written in the earth;" that is, if they turn away from God they may win a name for awhile, but it will be merely from the earth, and of the earth. They may obtain a fortune, and enjoy outward prosperity; they may be like David's green bay-tree that spread itself far and wide; but in the end it will turn out that they were like bullocks fattened for the slaughter, or like the swine that lie down in their sty, too well filled to move, but all the more sure to be killed. What an awful thing that a man should have his portion in this life and nothing to come hereafter! O worldlings, you have your riches in this poor country which is soon to be burned with fire. Your pleasures and treasures will melt in the fervent heat of the last days. Your life's pursuits are a short business, ending in eternal misery. They that have forsaken God will have their little day; but the more they prosper, and the richer they become, and the more famous they grow, so much the worse for them; for the higher they mount the more desperate shall be their fall.

We read that they "shall be written in the earth," and that means that they shall go into oblivion. If you were to go to a school in the East you would find that the children have no slates, and very few of them have wax tablets, for these are rather expensive; and so the schoolmaster spreads the floor with sand or earth, and you see the boys writing their copies on the ground. Then, of course, when they had finished their writing the master would just sweep the floor, and all the writing disappeared. Was this the meaning of our Saviour when he stooped down and wrote on the ground? When they brought to him

the woman taken in adultery, hypocrites that they were, you remember he stooped down and wrote on the ground as though he heard them not; as much as to say, "I shall rub it all out again: all that you have to say will be forgotten." So will it be with men who do not trust in God. Their names will be written in the sand, and in a little time the great foot of Providence will obliterate them all, and they will be quite forgotten. If you get honour in this life by sin, your fame carries its death within its own bowels. The greatest name that ever rung forth from the clarion of fame shall die out into oblivion or infamy if its honours are earned by an evil life. Oh, ye who dread a cold forgetfulness, live unto God, and then your names shall shine on for ever; but if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die, and leave your names for a curse unto the Lord's people!

The text tells us that there shall come something besides this: they that forsake God shall one day be sore athirst even unto death, "because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." There is for the soul but one fountain of water, flowing, cool, clear, ever refreshing. "All my springs are in thee," said David; and so may we say, for our only source of supply is the Lord our God. If a man turns away from God then he forsakes the cool fountain, he goes to broken cisterns that hold no water, and he will perish of thirst. Oh, my well-beloved hearers, I wish I were able to put this very strongly before you! You are such creatures that you must trust and love God, or else you will never possess that which you were created to enjoy; you must always be without the grand necessary of your being. You are vessels, but what will be the use of you if you are not filled? You are denying yourselves bread when you deny yourselves God—I mean bread for your souls. You must have God in Christ Jesus or else you will be as one that is parched with thirst in the Sahara. He looks around him eagerly for a well, but sees nothing save an ocean of sand. He rushes this way till the hot sand beneath his feet burns out of him all power to move; anon he struggles to his feet, and turns in the other direction, but with equal disappointment. He lifts his hands; he cries; he tears his hair in utter despair; he stoops down, he scoops a hole in the ground, he would fain dig to the very centre to find drink, but all in vain, he must pine away and die. His mouth is an oven, his tongue a firebrand, himself the victim of death. So, poor heart, there is nothing for you but God: if you forsake him you die. Young man, you are miserable to-day; you used to enjoy the theatre, and even baser amusement; but you cannot rejoice in them now, and I am thankful you cannot. You are becoming dissatisfied and wretched, but you need not remain so. Here is the living water fresh and free, and the Spirit bids me cry, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The supply for your soul is only to be found in this one well, the well of Bethlehem, the well which springs up from the depths of eternal love in Christ Jesus our Lord. God still sits enthroned in Jesus as upon a glorious high throne; he there receives thirsty sinners to himself, and gives them to drink till they are filled to the full.

Oh, when I take hold of my God I do not seem as if I wanted anything else. If I have God in Christ then am I all content, filled with all the fulness of God. "But troubles will come." Never mind troubles

as long as you have your God. I feel sometimes like Rutherford when he said he could swim through seven hells to get at Christ. So a man might well do. You will not mind the trials of life when once you know that God is yours. A boy once said to his fellow, "John, would you like to have been Elijah? Would you have dared to get into that chariot of fire with horses of fire?" "Yes," said the other, "I would not mind *if God drove*." That is how believers feel about everything. If God drives let us be fully at ease, for all must be well: if the Lord be King, those who trust in him are safe. Since Jehovah rules, and over-rules, we mount the chariot of fire or walk the waves of the sea and we are secure in either case. If the worst comes to the worst, we shall be wafted to the best place of all, up to the throne of God, to the right hand of the Most High. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words all ye who find sanctuary in your God; but if you trust not in the hope of Israel, you must thirst for ever and never attain to satisfaction.

III. Thirdly, and lastly, let us look at THE COMERS TO GOD. Those who come to God—how do they come? Very briefly, *they come away from all the world.* Poor Jeremiah had nobody to help him or comfort him: the best of the men that he met with were sharper than a thorn hedge, they only wounded him; therefore he came right out from them, and confessed that Jehovah, the hope of Israel, was his God and his sanctuary. He set himself quite alone for God and his fear. Come, then, you that wish to come to God, and find him to be your sanctuary; come right out from the world. I do not ask you just now, as my dear brother Moody does, to stand up, but I believe that if I were to say, "Let those that follow after God stand up," the bulk of you would gladly rise and acknowledge your Lord. If we do not at this moment adopt that mode of confessing Christ, yet we will do it in some way. Oh, brethren, own your Lord! "Come out from among them, and be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing." Come away, Lot, you cannot prosper and be happy in Sodom; you do not know or love the ways of the place. Lot settled there and thought he was going to get on first rate; but he was never happy. His righteous soul was vexed by the wicked citizens. I am glad it was so. Their ungodly conversation vexed righteous Lot, and he deserved to be vexed. If you try to be like worldlings, I hope they will not welcome your imitation. Whenever I am told of a man's holding with the hare and running with the hounds, I am always glad to hear that the dogs bite him. What business has he with the dogs? Come right out! O soul, if thou wouldst have peace, come away to your God. Never take your place with those who shall be written in the earth.

How did believers come to God of old? Jeremiah *came sick and needing to be saved*, for he cried, "Heal me, O Jehovah, save me." That is the way to come. If you want to have God and his glorious high throne to be your shelter, come just as you are, sick and sorry. Do not stop till you have bettered yourself; all bettering is mere battering till we come to Christ; then he betters us in real earnest, for he makes us new creatures in himself. Come along then, and say, "Heal me, and save me."

But *come to God with faith.* It was grand faith of Jeremiah which enabled him to say "Heal me, and I shall be healed." Sick as I am, if

thou wilt act as physician to me I shall be cured: if thou save me, lost as I am, I shall be saved. Come along, poor sinner. "Where, sir?" say you. To God in Christ Jesus. This is the gospel: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Come to your God, come to your God in Christ Jesus with the full conviction that he can and will heal you. "Heal me, and I shall be healed: save me, and I shall be saved."

And *come with this acknowledgment on your tongue,—"For thou art my praise."* Some of you can say already, "Thou art my praise." "O Lord, I will praise thee." "Jehovah is my strength and my song." Oh, I think if I were worn out with disease, and if I had to a large extent lost my powers of speech, and powers of thought too, I could, if I were startled at the dead of night sit up in my shirt sleeves and speak to the praise of the Lord my God. That is a subject upon which a child of God can surely talk in his sleep. We have a good God, a loving God, a tender God, a gracious God, a God full of long-suffering and mercy and faithfulness to us poor sinners.

> "I'll praise him in life, I'll praise him in death,
> I'll praise him as long as he lendeth me breath;
> And say when the death dew lies cold on my brow,
> If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now."

This is good argument in prayer;—"I have made my boast in thee, O God, I pray thee let not my glorying be stopped. Be to me as I have declared thou wilt be."

But suppose you cannot say so much as that, then put it this way:—"Heal me, O Lord; heal me this morning; save me, O Lord; save me at once, and thou shalt be my praise. Lord, I promise that I will never rob thee of the honour of my salvation; if thou wilt but save me thou shalt have all the glory of it." Oh, how I used to feel when I first sought the Lord, that if saved it must be all of grace; I felt that I should never have a word to say in my own praise, but every syllable should be for Jesus. I was ashamed and confounded, and could never open my mouth any more in my own defence, but all must be to my Redeemer's praise? When I get to heaven how I will bless and magnify his name; meanwhile I would practise the holy exercise even here. O troubled ones, come to him just as you are; trust him, and he will save you. Then will your heart say—

> "Now for the love I bear his name
> What was my gain I count my loss;
> My former pride I call my shame,
> And nail my glory to his cross."

Henceforth I give myself up wholly to that one work of praising and magnifying and adoring the name of the Most High. After fifty years of life I have no ambition but to glorify my Lord. Beloved, if you get the glorious high throne to be your sanctuary, I am sure you will praise the Lord your King for ever and ever.

How is the preacher going to close with an appeal for the hospitals? This is the day for the Hospital Collection, and I hope you will give largely: I think the text suggests it. If you pray for healing, help others who need healing. If your prayer is, "Save me," if you expect the Lord to have mercy upon you, have mercy upon others. As you serve a great God, have large hearts, and give liberally, like followers of the generous Lord Jesus. If the beloved Physician has healed all your diseases, show your gratitude by what you do for the sick poor in the hospitals of London this day. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jeremiah vii. 1—14; xvii. 1—14.

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HUMILITY THE FRIEND OF PRAYER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 22ND, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands."—Genesis xxxii. 10.

JACOB'S character was far from faultless, but equally removed from despicable. He possessed great strength of character and force of judgment, and this became somewhat a snare to him, so that he did not always move through life with the childlike repose of Isaac, or the royal serenity of Abraham, but was at times crafty and pettifogging, like his relatives on the mother's side. Yet I demur to that depreciation of Jacob's character which is so common in certain quarters, because he used the means, as well as prayed. Our God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, *and of Jacob;* and very frequently he is called *the God of Israel*, and even *the God of Jacob*. "He is not ashamed to be called their God:" and if he is not ashamed to be called Jacob's God, no fellow-believer has any right to be ashamed of Jacob. With all his imperfections—and he certainly had them—he was a noble man. Some good people are built upon too small a scale to display either good or bad qualities in any high degree,—let not such carp at a great man like Jacob. He has impressed his character upon multitudinous generations, and a whole nation bears his lineaments. He was a man full of energy, active, enduring, resolute, and hence his infirmities became more conspicuous than they would have been in a quieter and more restful nature.

Say what you will of him, he was a master of the art of prayer, and he that can pray well is a princely man. He that can prevail with God will certainly prevail with men. It seems to me that when once a man is taught of the Lord to pray he is equal to every emergency that can possibly arise. Depend upon it, it will go hard with any man who fights against a man of prayer. All other weapons may be dashed aside; but the weapon of All-prayer, invisible though it may be, and despised of the worldling, hath in it a might and majesty which will secure the victory. The sword of prayer hath such an edge that it will cut through coats of mail. Jacob was a prevailing prince when he came upon his knees.

Dr. Kitto, in his admirable Bible Illustrations, has a chapter upon this chapter which is entitled, "The First Prayer." I take leave to differ a little from that title. This can hardly be said to be the first prayer that is recorded in Scripture. I admit that the excellent writer excludes the prayer of Abraham for Sodom as rather an intercession than a prayer; but there are other prayers of Abraham, and other instances of supplication. Yet it may be truly said that this is the first prayer in the Bible of a man for himself, which is given at full length; and being the first, it may be viewed in some degree as a pattern for succeeding pleaders. If you examine it carefully, you will find that it is a valuable model which may be copied by any child of God in the day of his trouble. Jacob begins by pleading the covenant:—"O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac": what better plea can we have than the covenant of a faithful God, which he has already fulfilled to our fathers? He next pleads a special promise which had been made to himself. That promise was wrapt up in the folds of a precept which he was obeying: "Thou saidst unto me, return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee." While we plead the general covenant made with all believers in Christ, we may also particularly and especially plead any promise which has been laid home to our own soul by the Spirit of the blessed God. Next, he proceeded to plead his own unworthiness; by faith he turned even his faultiness into an argument, as I shall have to show you: "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." Furthermore, he went on to plead with God, stating his special danger: "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." He also set the little children and their danger before God—a strong plea with such a God of love as we have: "Lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." Then he concluded with what must ever remain a potent plea with God: "Thou saidst." He urged God's promise, and virtually cried, "Do as thou hast said." It is wise to spread the promise before him who gave it, and to beg for its fulfilment. We may appeal to God's faithfulness, and cry, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope."

The very first sentence of Jacob's prayer has this peculiarity about it, that *it is steeped in humility;* for he does not address the Lord as his own God at the first, but as the God of Abraham and Isaac. The prayer itself, though it is very urgent, is never presumptuous; it is as lowly as it is earnest. I take it that even when Jacob in his desperation grasped the angel, and said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," there was no undue familiarity in his holy boldness. There was an extraordinary courage, and an invincible determination; but it was of the kind which God approves, otherwise he would not have blessed him there. No man wins a blessing through a sinful act towards God. Throughout this prayer I see, with all its intensity, a loving remembrance of who Jacob is, and who Jehovah is; and the suppliant speaks in terms fit to be used towards the thrice holy God by a man of lowly heart.

This is to be the subject of our discourse—*humility is the fit attitude of prayer.* We will begin with that—"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." Then we will advance in the second place to remark that

humility is promoted by the same considerations which encourage prayer—that I shall show you from the text; and thirdly, *humility suggests and supplies many arguments which can be used in prayer.* A proud man has few reasons to bring before God; but the humbler a man is, the more numerous are his prevailing pleas. Prayer is a suitable employment for a sinner, and a sinner is the best person to exercise prayer.

I. Our first observation is that HUMILITY IS THE FIT ATTITUDE OF PRAYER. I do not think that Jacob could have prayed unless he had stripped off the robes of self-justification which he wore in his controversy with Laban, and had stood disrobed before the infinite majesty of the Most High.

Observe that he here speaks *not as before man, but as before God;* and he cries, "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." He had been talking with Laban,—Laban who had made a slave of him, who had used him in the most mercenary manner, and who had now pursued him in fierce anger because he had quitted his service with his wives and children that he might go back to his native country. To Laban he does not say, "I am not worthy of what I possess," for, as far as churlish Laban was concerned, he was worthy of a great deal more than had ever been rendered to him in the form of wage. To Laban he uses many truthful sentences of self-vindication and justification. Laban's substance had greatly increased under Jacob's unceasing care. He cared for Laban's flocks with constant diligence, and he says, "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." He declares that he had never taken a ram of the flock wherewith to feed his own family; that he had, in fact, for many years worked with no wages except the daughters who became his wives; and he goes the length of saying, "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty." The same man who speaks in that fashion to Laban turns round and confesses to his God, "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." This is perfectly consistent and truthful. Humility is not telling falsehoods against yourself: humility is forming a right estimate of yourself. As towards Laban it was a correct estimate for a man who had worked so hard for so little to claim that he had a right to what God had given him; and yet as before God it was perfectly honest and sincere of Jacob to say, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant." Now, whenever you go to prayer, if you have previously been compelled to say some rather strong thing as to your own integrity and industry; or, if you have heard others speak in your praise, forget it all; for you cannot pray if it has any effect upon you. A man cannot pray with a good opinion of himself: all he can manage is just to mutter, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are," and that is no prayer at all. A lofty view of your own excellence will tempt you to look down with contempt upon your neighbour; and that is death to prayer. God drives out of his temple all proud prayers: he cannot endure such provocations. Thou must put thy shoe from off thy foot when thou standest on holy ground,—that same shoe which it is quite right for thee to wear when thou hast to tread upon the lion and the dragon,—that same shoe which fits thee well, and

which it befits thee to wear when travelling through this great and terrible wilderness. Put off before thy God even that which thou art forced to wear before churlish men. When we see Jesus we say of him, "whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." "Lord, I am not worthy," is our cry. Like Abraham, we acknowledge that we are but dust and ashes; less than the least of all saints; honoured by being allowed to discharge any menial function in our Master's house. See, then, that it was essential for Jacob to get into his right attitude after having disputed with Laban. It was fit that in lifting his eyes to heaven he should use the lowliest language, and by no means pretend to any desert in the presence of the thrice Holy One.

Brethren, *it would ill become any of us to use the language of merit before God;* for merit we have none; and if we had any, we should not need to pray. It has been well observed by an old divine, that the man who pleads his own merit does not pray, but demands his due. If I ask a man to pay me a debt, I am not a suppliant, but a plaintiff claiming my rights. The prayer of a man who thinks he is meritorious is like serving the Lord with a writ: it is not offering a request, it is issuing a demand. Merit in effect says, "Pay me that thou owest." Little will such a man get of God; for if the Lord only pays to us what he owes us, yonder place of torment will be our speedy heritage. If while living here we receive no more than we deserve, we shall be offcasts and outcasts. The meanest of mendicants obtain more than their deserts. Even life itself is a gift from the Creator; "wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" Let us be brought low as we may, we still must own that "it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." Any other attitude but that of humility would be most unbecoming and presumptuous in the presence of the Most High.

Let me add, also, that *in times of great pressure upon the heart there is not much fear of self-righteousness intruding.* Jacob was greatly afraid and sore distressed; and when a man is brought into such a state the lowliest language suits him. They that are filled with bread may boast, but the hungry beg. Let the proud take heed lest while the bread is yet in their mouths the wrath of God come upon them. He that is brought to penury, he that is distressed in spirit, he that lies at death's door, is not a man to show the peacock's feather and display his finery. Then he looks about him to the loving-kindness of the Lord, and he pleads for mercy. This is his one cry—"Mercy, mercy." He finds that he cannot pray until he has come to his true standing as an undeserving one; but having reached that he has a firm foothold, for he pleads the absolute sovereignty of divine grace, and the boundless love of the divine heart as substantial arguments for mercy. I am persuaded that in our prayers we fail at times because we do not get low enough. On thy face before the throne thou shalt prevail. If thou hast any righteousness of thine own, thou shalt never have Christ's righteousness. If thou hast no sin, thou shalt have no washing in the precious blood. If thou art strong, thou shalt be left to thine own weakness. If thou art rich and increased in goods, thou shalt be sent empty away. But when thou canst truly confess thy nothingness, and lie low before God,

he must hear thee. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." No prayers speed better in the heights than those which rise from the depths. When thou art naked the Lord will clothe thee; when thou art hungry he will feed thee; when thou art nothing he will be thine all in all; for then it is that he will win glory to himself, and his mercies will not be perverted to feed thy pride. When our mercies magnify the Lord we shall have many of them, but when we use them for the magnifying of our own selves they will depart from us. See, then, dear friend, how necessary it is that we should approach the Lord in the attitude of humility.

I call your attention to the present tense as it is used in the text—Jacob does not say, as we might half have thought he would have said, "I *was* not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast made to pass before thy servant," but he says "I *am not* worthy." He does not merely allude to his unworthiness when he crossed this Jordan with a staff in his hand, a poor solitary banished man: he believes that he was unworthy then; but even now, looking upon his flocks and his herds and his great family, and all that he had done and suffered, he cries, "*I am not* worthy." What, has not all God's mercy made you worthy? Brethren, free grace is neither the child nor the father of human worthiness. If we get all the grace we ever can get we shall never be worthy of that grace; for grace as it enters where there is no worthiness, so it imparts to us no worthiness afterwards as we are judged before God. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants; we have only done what it was our duty to have done. I cannot bear the man who, in his foolish prattle about his own perfection, talks as if he had become worthy of grace. The Lord have mercy upon such boasters, and bring them to the true moorings, so that they may own that they are not worthy. When you and I shall get to heaven, though God may say, "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy," yet it will never be right for any one of us to say that we are worthy of anything that God has bestowed upon us. Our psalm must be *Non nobis Domine*:—"Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." To touch the praise which comes to us through the operations of divine grace, even with our little finger, were treason against the Most High. To assume for a moment that we deserve anything of the Lord God, is so vain-glorious, so false, so unjust that we ought to loathe the very thought of it, and cry like Jacob, "I am not worthy." Job, who had defended himself with vigour and possibly with bitterness, no sooner heard God speaking to him in the whirlwind than he cried, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Prostrate before the throne is the proper attitude of prayer: in humility is our strength for supplication.

II. Secondly, the same thought will be kept up, but put in a somewhat differing light, while we note that THOSE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH MAKE TOWARDS HUMILITY ARE THE STRENGTH OF PRAYER.

Observe, first, that Jacob in this prayer showed his humility by *a confession of the Lord's working in all his prosperity*. He says with a full heart, "All the mercies and all the truth which thou hast shewed

unto thy servant." Well, but Jacob, you have immense flocks of sheep, but you earned them, and through your care they greatly increased : do you not consider that those flocks are entirely your own procuring ? Surely you must see that you were highly industrious, prudent, and careful, and thus grew wealthy ? No ; he takes a survey of his great estate, and he speaks of it all as *mercies*,—mercies which the Lord had shewed unto his servant. I do not object to books about *self-made men*, but I am afraid that self-made men have a great tendency to worship him that made them. It is very natural they should. But, brethren, if we are self-made, I am sure we had a very bad maker, and there must be a great many flaws in us. It would be better to be ground back to dust again, and made over anew so as to become God-made man. Listen, O proud self-made mortal ! What if thou hast earned everything, who gave thee strength to earn it ? What if thy success be due to thy shrewd sense, who gave thee skill and foresight ? What if thou hast been frugal and industrious, yet why wast thou not left to be as prodigal as others, and to waste in riot what God bestowed on thee ? Oh, sir, if thou art lifted an inch above the dunghill thou shouldst bless God for it, for it is from the dunghill thou hast come. God helps his servants while they are weak, but when they fancy themselves strong, he frequently humbles them. When we cry, "Behold this great Babylon that I have builded," God may not cast us off, but he will cast us down. He did not cast off Nebuchadnezzar, but he did allow him to lose his reason and mingle with the beasts of the field. If we act brutishly, the Lord may allow us to become like beasts in other matters. The use of our reasoning powers is a boon of heavenly charity which should lead us to deep gratitude, but never induce in us pride as to our superior abilities. If we are out of Bedlam we ought to bless the Lord in the humblest manner. Shall we dare to glory in our talents ? Shall the axe boast against him that heweth therewith ? Shall the net exalt itself against the fisherman who drags the sea therewith ? That were, indeed, a folly, a God-provoking folly. Inasmuch as God does so much for us, we ought to be humbled by the weight of obligation which love heaps upon us.

This may also yield us a hold upon God in prayer, for now we can say, "Lord, thou hast done all this for me : it is plain that thy hand has been in all thy servant's happiness ; let thy hand be with me still." Oh, self-made man, when you have made yourself, can you keep yourself and preserve yourself in being ? And do you hope to get to heaven and throw up your cap and say, "Hosanna to myself" ? Do you reckon upon such vainglory ? If you seek your own glory you shall find no place in that city where God's glory is the all-pervading bliss of the place. So, then, that which tends to keep us humble also becomes an assistance to us in our prayer.

The next point is *a consideration of God's mercies.* For my part, nothing ever sinks me so low as the mercy of God, and next to that I am readily subdued by the kindness of men. When the clarion rings out for battle I will stand foot to foot with him that dare encounter me, and all the man within me is aroused to the conflict ; but when all is peace and quiet, and everyone wishes me well, I wonder at their kindness, and I sink into my shoes with fear lest I should act in any way

unworthily. The man who has a due sense of his own character will be laid low by words of commendation. When we remember the loving-kindness of the Lord to us we cannot but contrast our littleness with the greatness of his love, and feel a sense of self-debasement. It is written, "They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it." The words are true to the letter. Take a case: Peter went a fishing; and if he had caught a few fish, his boat would have floated high on the lake; but when the Master came into the boat and told him where to throw the net so that he pulled up a multitude of fish, then the little barque began to sink. Down, down, it went, and poor Peter went down with it, till he fell at Jesus' feet and cried, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He was confused and overwhelmed, or he would never have asked the blessed Master to leave him: Christ's goodness had fairly beaten him till he was afraid of his Benefactor. Know ye not what it is to be weighted down with infinite goodness, oppressed with mercy, swept away by an avalanche of love. I, at least, know what it means, and I know of no experience which has made me so little in mine own eyes.

I feel less than the least of all his mercies; I shrink, and tremble in the presence of his bounty. If even providential goodness does this, you may be sure that redeeming love will be even more effectual. Here is a proud sinner, boasting of his own righteousness; you cannot get his self-glorying out of him: but by-and-by he learns that the Son of God gave his life to redeem him, poured out his heart upon Calvary's cross, the just for the unjust, to bring him to God; and now he is of another mind. No man could ever think that he deserved that the Son of God should die for him! If he does think so, he must be out of his mind. Dying love touches the heart, and the man cries, "Lord, I am not worthy of a drop of thy precious blood; I am not worthy of a sigh from thy sacred heart; I am not worthy that thou shouldest have lived on earth for me, much less that thou shouldest have died for me." A sense of that wondrous condescension which is the highest commendation of God's love, that in due time Christ died for the ungodly, brings the man down upon his knees, dissolved by the mercies of God. Now, if there is any man here who has a good hope through grace that by-and-by he will be with God in heaven, if he will meditate upon the beatific vision, if he will picture to himself the crown upon his head, and the palm branch in his hand, and himself enjoying the everlasting hallelujah,

> "Far from a world of grief and sin,
> With God eternally shut in";

why, the next thing he will do is to sit down and weep that this can be possible to him. Such a poor, useless, sinful soul as I am, can I be glorified, and has Jesus gone to prepare a place for me? Does he give me his own assurance that he will come again, and receive me to himself? Am I a joint heir with Christ, and a favoured child of God? This makes us lose ourselves in adoring gratitude. Oh, sirs, we can never open our mouth again in the way of boasting; our pride is drowned in this sea of mercy. If we had a little Saviour, and a little heaven, and little mercy we might still hang out our flags; but with a great Saviour, and great mercy, and a great heaven we can only go in like

David, and sit before the Lord, and say, "Whence is this to me?" I have a dear brother in Christ who is now sore sick, the Rev. Mr. Curme, the vicar of Sandford, in Oxfordshire, who has been my dear friend for many years. He is the mirror of humility, and he divides his name into two words, *Cur me?* which means, "Why me?" Often did he say, in my hearing, "Why me, Lord? Why me?" Truly I can say the same, *Cur me?*

> "Why was I made to hear thy voice,
> And enter where there's room;
> While thousands make a wretched choice
> And rather starve than come?"

This exceeding kindness of the Lord all tends to promote humility, and at the same time to help us in prayer; for if the Lord be so greatly good, we may adopt the language of the Phœnecian woman when the Master said to her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." She answered, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." So we will go and ask our Lord to give us crumbs of mercy, and they will be enough for us poor dogs. God's crumbs are bigger than man's loaves; and if he gives us what to him may be a crumb, it shall be a meal to us. Oh, he is a great Giver! He is a glorious Giver! We are not equal to his least gift! We cannot estimate his least mercy, nor describe it fully, nor praise him for it sufficiently. His shallows are too deep for us; his mole-hill mercies overtop us; what shall we say of his mountain mercies?

Again, *a comparison of our past and our present* will tend to humility and also to helpfulness in prayer. Jacob at first is described thus, "With my staff I passed over this Jordan." He is all alone, no servant attends him; he has no goods, not even a change of linen in a parcel, nothing but a staff to walk with; now, after a few years, here is Jacob coming back, crossing the river in the opposite direction, and he has with him two bands. He is a large grazier, with great wealth in all manner of cattle. What a change! I would have those men whom God has prospered never to be ashamed of what they used to be; they ought never to forget the staff with which they crossed this Jordan. I had a good friend who preserved the axle-tree of the truck in which he wheeled home his goods when he first came to London. It was placed over his front door, and he never blushed to tell how he came up from the country, worked hard, and made his way in the world. I like this a deal better than the affected gentility which forgets the lone half-crown which pined in solitude in their pockets when they entered this city. They are indignant if you remind them of their poor old father in the country, for they have discovered that the family is very ancient and honourable; in fact, one of their ancestors came over with the Conqueror. I have never felt any wish to be related to that set of vagabonds; but tastes differ, and there are some who think that they must be superior beings because they are descended from Norman freebooters. Nobodies suddenly swell as if they were everybody. Observe that Jacob does not say, "Years ago I was at home with my father Isaac, a man of large estate." Nor does he talk of his grandfather Abraham as a nobleman of an ancient family in Ur, of the Chaldees, who was entertained by monarchs. No, he was not so silly as to boast of

aristocracy and wealth, but he frankly owns his early poverty :—"With my staff, a poor, lonely, friendless man, I crossed this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." It humbles him to think of what he was, but at the same time it strengthens him in prayer; for in effect he pleads, "Lord, hast thou made two bands of me that Esau may have the more to destroy? Hast thou given me these children that they may fall by the sword?" So again I say, that which humbled also encouraged him : he found his strength in prayer in those very things which furnished motives for lowliness.

III. And now, as time flies, we must dwell upon the third point, still hammering the same nail on the head : TRUE HUMILITY SUPPLIES US WITH ARGUMENTS IN PRAYER.

Look at the first one, "*I am not worthy* of all thy mercies;" nay, "I am not worthy of the least of all the many mercies which thou hast shewed unto thy servant. Thou hast kept thy word and been true to me, but it was not because I was true to thee. I am not worthy of the truth which thou hast shewn to thy servant." Is there not power in such a prayer? Is not mercy secured by a confession of unworthiness? The man whom Christ most of all commended, as far as I remember, was he who used this very language. The centurion came to Christ and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof"; yet this was he of whom the Lord said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Depend on it, if you want Christ's commendation you must be lowly in your own esteem; for he never praises the proud, but he honours the humble. Since the Lord was thus gracious to him when he was unworthy, had not Jacob splendid ground to stand upon while he wrestled with God, and cried, Deliver me from Esau, my brother, though because of the wrong I did him I am not worthy of such deliverance? We are always afraid in our time of trouble that God will deal with us according to our unworthiness; but he will not. We say to ourselves, "At last the sins of my youth have come home to me; now I shall be dealt with according to my iniquities!" But Jacob virtually said, "Lord, I never was worthy of the least thing that thou hast done for me, and all thy dealings to me are in pure grace. I stand still where I always must stand, a debtor to thy sovereign undeserved favour; and I appeal to thee,—since thou hast done all this for me, an undeserving one, I beseech thee, do yet more. I have not changed, for I am as undeserving as ever, and thou hast not changed, for thou art as good as ever, therefore still deliver thy servant." This is mighty pleading with the Most High.

Then please to notice that while Jacob thus pleads his own unworthiness he is not slow to plead *God's goodness*. He speaks in most expressive words, wide and full of meaning. "I am not worthy of the least of *all thy mercies*. I cannot enumerate them, the list would be too long! It seems to me as if thou hadst given me all kinds of mercies, every sort of blessing. Thy mercy endureth for ever, and thou hast given it all to me." How he extols God as with a full mouth when he says, "All thy mercies." He does not say, "all thy mercy"—the word is in the plural—"the least of all thy *mercies*." For God has many bands of mercies; favours never come alone, they visit us in troops. All the trees in God's vineyard are full of boughs, and each bough is loaded

with fruit. All the flowers in God's garden bloom double, and some of them bloom sevenfold. We have not mercy only, but mercies numerous as the sand. Mercy for the past, the present, the future; mercy to temper sorrows, mercy to purify joys; mercy for our sinful things, mercy for our holy things. "All thy mercies": the expression has a vast acreage of meaning. He does not know how to express his sense of obligation except with plurals and universals: the language is so full I could never exhibit all its meaning. He seems to say to the Lord, "Because of all this great goodness, I pray thee go on to deal well with thy servant. Save me from Esau, or all thy mercies will be lost. Hast thou not in thy past love given pledge to me to keep me even to the end?" Mercy and truth all through the Bible are continually joined together, "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." "God shall send forth his mercy and his truth." These two gracious ones grasp hands in Jacob's prayer—"All thy mercies and all thy truth." Oh, brethren, if you would wrestle with God and prevail, use much these two master arguments, mercies and truth. These are two keys which will open all the treasures of God; these are two shields behind which you will be out of reach of every fiery arrow. That which made Jacob humble, also made him strong in prayer. Gratitude for mercy made him bow before God, but it also enabled him to grasp the angel with the hand of believing importunity.

Notice, next, how he says "*Thy servant.*" A plea is hidden away in that word. Jacob might have called himself by some other name on this occasion. He might have said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy *child*": it would have been true, it would not have been fitting. Suppose it had run—"Unto *thy chosen*," it would have been true, but not so lowly; or "unto *thy covenanted one*,"—that would have been correct, but not so humble an expression as Jacob felt bound to use in this time of his distress, when the sins of his youth were brought to his mind. He seemed to say, "Lord, I am thy servant. Thou didst bid me come hither, and hither I have come because of that bidding: therefore protect me." Surely a king will not see his servant put upon when engaged in the royal service. Jacob was in the path of duty, and God would make it the path of safety. If we make God our guide, he will be our guard. If he be our Commander he will be our Defender. He will not permit any Esau to smite with the sword one of his Jacobs. When we fully cast ourselves upon the Lord by a believing obedience, we may depend upon it that he will bear us up and bear us through. Masters are commanded to give unto their servants that which is just and equal, and we may be sure that our Master in heaven will do the same to each of us who serve him. Jacob was in danger through his service, and therefore the Lord's honour was pledged to see him through. It may seem a small thing to be a servant, but it is a great thing to plead in the hour of need; so David used it: "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." "Hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble." "O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee." These are but specimens of the ways in which men of God used their position as servants as an argument for mercy.

Jacob had yet another plea which shewed his humility, and that was *the argument of facts.* "With my staff," says he, "I passed over this Jordan." "This Jordan," which flowed hard by, and received the Jabbok. It brings a thousand things to his mind, to be on the old spot again. When he crossed it before he was journeying into exile, but now he is coming back as a son, to take his place with loved Rebekah and father Isaac, and he could not but feel it a great mercy that he was now going in a happier direction than before. He looked at his staff, and he remembered how in fear and trembling he had leaned upon it as he pursued his hasty, lonely march. "With this staff—that is all I had." He looks upon it, and contrasts his present condition and his two camps with that day of poverty, that hour of hasty flight. This retrospect humbled him, but it must have been a strength to him in prayer. "O God, if thou hast helped me from abject want to all this wealth, thou canst certainly preserve me in the present danger. He who has done so much is still able to bless me, and he will do so."

> "Can he have taught me to trust in his name,
> And thus far have brought me to bring me to shame?"

Does God mock men? Does he encourage their hope and then leave them? No, the God that begins to bless perseveres in blessing, and even to the end continues to love his chosen.

In closing, I think I discover one powerful argument here in Jacob's prayer. Did he not mean that although God had increased him so greatly, there had come with it *all the greater responsibility?* He had more to care for than when he owned less. Duty had increased with increased possessions. He seems to say, "Lord, when I came this way before I had nothing, only a staff; that was all I had to take care of; and if I had lost that staff I could have found another. Then I had thy dear and kind protection, which was better to me than riches. Shall I not have it still? When I was a single man with a staff thou didst guard me, and now that I am surrounded by this numerous family of little children and servants, wilt thou not spread thy wings over me? Lord, the gifts of thy goodness increase my necessity: give me proportionately thy blessing. I could before run away and escape from my angry brother; but now the mothers and the children bind me, and I must abide with them and die with them unless thou preserve me." My brethren, at this hour I know how to use this self-same plea. To me every advance in position among men means more obligation to serve my Lord and bless my generation. I need more grace, or my failure will be the more shameful. Unworthy as we are of all this blessing, yet we dare not trifle with it, and refuse to serve our God with all our powers. The more oxen the more ploughing has to be done; the broader the fields the more laboriously must we sow; the larger the harvest the more industriously must we reap; for all this we need much more strength. If God blesses and increases us in talent, or in substance, or in any way, ought we not to conclude that the larger trust involves greater responsibility? Thus our life's task grows sterner, and more difficult, and we are driven more than ever to our God. This is our argument!—"O Lord, thou hast imposed upon me a wider service; give me more

grace. In thy goodness thou hast committed more talents to him that had ten talents; wilt thou not give more help to put all out to interest for thy name's sake?" Yes, brother, as God uplifts you, take care that you bow lower and lower at his feet. Consecrate even more entirely your whole being unto God. Be thankful if your pound has gained one pound; and if he doth more for you, be restless till his five pounds have gained five other pounds. Let the goodness of God, instead of becoming a cloke for your pride, or a couch for your sloth, be an incentive to your industry, a stimulus to your zeal. May it help your humility, but at the same time encourage your confidence when you draw near to God in prayer, to feel how largely you are under obligations to serve the Lord.

Come, dear friends, the Lord hath been mindful of us as a church, and he will bless us. We have obtained, through our Lord Jesus and his Spirit, blessings so large that I can say in your name, we are not worthy of the least of all these mercies. Shall we not use them to God's glory? Yes, more than ever: for we are determined to pray more, and to believe more, and to work more, and to be more full of courage and dauntless resolve that the name and the truth of Jesus shall be made known wherever our voice can be heard. As long as tongues can speak and hearts can beat, God helping us, we will live for Jesus our Lord. We are what Rutherford would call "drowned debtors"; let us be living lovers. Our ships have gone down in a sea of love till mercy rolls over our topmasts. So be it. So be it. We are swallowed up in an abyss of love. My figure describes us as sinking, but in very truth it is thus we rise by being filled with all the fulness of God. With a full heart I pray for you, beloved. God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis xxxii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—Psalm 103 (Version II.), 705, 214.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PROOF OF OUR MINISTRY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 29TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"—2 Corinthians xiii. 3, 4, 5.

THE apostle had much joy in being the founder, the father, and the fosterer of so many churches, but this joy brought with it constant and heavy trial. Care pressed heavily upon him, for he mentions it as the crown and crush of all his burdens,—"That which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." He was not simply as a father among them, but he was as a nurse, continually on the watch, and in all tenderness anxious for her little ones. He was deeply grieved when he saw anything wrong, lest he should have laboured in vain, and should see any perish who appeared to be hopeful converts. He always had in his mind's eye the account which he would have to give at the last, and his prayer was that he might render that account with joy and not with grief, for he adds, "That is unprofitable for you." His whole soul went after the people of his charge, and his heart sank within him when he observed sin prominent among them.

The Corinthian church was enriched with many gifts, but impoverished by slender grace: this church had elected to conduct its arrangements upon the principle of everybody speaking who had something to say; moreover, it chose to be a church without rule and order, not caring to appoint officers who should be shepherds of the flock. That church seems to have been a frequent trial to the apostle, and after writing to them once very earnestly, he wrote to them a second time with equal tenderness and energy; and then he said he should have to visit them in person, and when he did come he should by discipline among them make them know that Christ would not endure sin in his church. Whatever they had to say about Paul personally he meant to be faithful to God and to the truth, and he was sure that the power of God would be with him to support him in the work of reformation. He writes in a sorrowful strain, and yet one cannot help seeing how calm

and judicious he is: how deliberately he enquires into evidence, and how impartially he judges the case. He had an intense desire to do the right, and hence passion and prejudice did not operate upon him. In this particular text he shows the high qualities of moral courage, inflexible justice, loving tenderness, and wise prudence; proving himself to be a fit leader of the host.

On account of Paul's having put his finger upon the mischief that was among them, the Corinthians turned round upon him, and disparaged him: his letters might be weighty and powerful, but his personal presence was weak; and his speech—well, it was contemptible. Whether he was an apostle at all they questioned. Had he lived with Christ? had he sat at Jesus' feet? No: it was apparent to everybody that his conversion took place after the departure of the Lord, and you could never be quite sure that he had been supernaturally called, as he said he had been. Thus they murmured among themselves. From this ordeal Paul does not shrink for a moment, but he answers all their evil speeches in the language before us.

First, notice that he exhibits *God's chosen method of operation* in the church by his appointed servants; this is a very interesting feature in the text. Secondly, he shows them what was *the sure proof of power;* and then, thirdly, he turns the tables upon those who had examined him, and bids them give *the needed proof of themselves:* "Examine yourselves; prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

I. The apostle Paul teaches us in these verses THE LORD'S CHOSEN METHOD OF OPERATION. The rebellious Corinthians had spoken ill of the apostle as lacking in power: his personal presence was not commanding, his speech was not fascinating, and so forth. Paul does not deny the charge, nor endeavour to exalt himself, but he glories in his infirmities because the power of God rests upon him. He admits anything they may have to say about his deficiency in natural dignity and elocution, but he declares the general principle of *power in weakness*, by which the Lord conducts the matters of the gospel dispensation. Power in weakness is the great secret of the gospel mode of working. Life, born of death, is the life of our souls; a life which would never have been in us at all if it had not been for the most cruel death on record, when men crucified the ever-blessed Lord. The apostle says, in verse 4, "Though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you"; that is to say, our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished his mighty purpose by becoming weak; through his weakness he became able to suffer, and to die—in order to save us from the thraldom of sin.

It was necessary that the Infinite should lay by his power, and become an infant; that he who ruleth over all things should become himself obedient unto death; that he who wore the royal robe of sovereignty should be found in fashion as a man. He made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and fulfilled the divine law. Yea more, inasmuch as a great sacrifice must be offered for sin, a death was required; but it was not possible that God, regarded as God purely and simply, should die, therefore Jesus stooped to our weakness, and by weakness received the power to die, if I may call it so, that

he might by that death redeem us. By assuming our weakness he gained the power to act as our substitute, and put away our sin by the sacrifice of himself. I am not aware of any other passage of Scripture where weakness is in so many words ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ. This makes the text the more striking. Remember that there was resident within his complex person a boundless power which he could at once exert. He permitted some outgoings of that power occasionally to let men see that his subjection was voluntary. He said of his life, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself." Yet he was weak, so that another was called in to bear his cross; he cried, "I thirst"; he appealed to his God, saying, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" and he was brought into the dust of death. He only spoke to those who came to take him, and they fell backward: a word would have brought him twelve legions of angels; truly did he say to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." Yet as a voluntary captive he was bound, and as a willing substitute he died: "he saved others, himself he could not save." Even on the cross he displayed abundant evidence that he possessed inherent omnipotence, for before he gave up the ghost the mid-day sun veiled its face, and travelled on in tenfold night; the veil which hid the holy of holies was rent in twain as by giant hands; the rocks were rent; the earth shook, and the dead arose; to let men see that he who died in weakness was none other than the Son of God. He used his weakness as the instrument of his strength by which he became almighty to redeem.

Now, you perceive that this weakness of Christ is the way in which he exerts a wondrous power among men. Because of his being obedient to death, even the death of the cross, "God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth." Because he died in weakness he has become mighty to save by the putting away of sin. Hath he not already finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness? By this sign he conquered: the ensign of his bloody cross is the seal of victory. It is himself wounded, himself hung up as a malefactor, himself dead as a victim on the altar before the most high God: it is himself thus slain which is his power to pardon and to save.

You know, brethren, that our Lord's power over our hearts comes by his great love, and the matchless manner of his showing it. Stooping so low to save such unworthy ones he conquers our hearts. His dying love has begotten living love within us. It sends a spear into the heart of sin that Jesus yielded his heart for our sakes; this nails up the hands and feet of our rebellious lusts, to think that Jesus was crucified for us; this leads us in golden fetters, the happy captives of his mighty grace, when we behold how his love stooped to the curse for us. The weakness of Christ is stronger in its power over our hearts than all his strength could have been. It is by weakness that Christ hath achieved his mighty purpose. To-day he has left his weakness on the cross, and gone upward to his throne, but there he sits clothed with a glory born of his weakness. The eyes of my faith e'en now behold him. I am glad I do not see him more clearly, else must I cease to speak to you, and fall at his feet as dead, so great is his majesty,

so glorious is his exaltation. That glory in our esteem has sprung out of his weakness, his sorrow, his death. Thy brightest coronet, O Christ, is fashioned from the crown of thorns! Thou art more lovely now than ere thou wast before! The marks of thy passion have made thee altogether lovely in the eyes of thy people!

Why did Paul interject this teaching? It was to show us that this great principle runs through all God's work in the saving of men. He does not save men to-day by the strength of his ministers, but by their weakness: and it is not the power of the gospel, judged after the manner of the flesh, that is to conquer nations; but, as in our Lord's case, the victory is to be won by weakness. Look at Paul himself—he came among these Corinthian people, and I dare say when they were first converted they felt like the Galatians, that they could pluck out their own eyes and give them to him; but after a while, when he was very faithful, they turned against him, and said he was no orator, he had no great force of conception, or majesty of diction. The apostle was willing enough to admit that he was devoid of such showy gifts. Though you and I at a distance think very greatly of Paul, and very rightly so, yet among those cavillers he was lightly esteemed. He did not give himself the lofty airs of the great teachers of the day, and hence foolish persons despised him. Some liked Apollos better, and others preferred Cephas, and thus they formed parties, agreeing in opposing Paul, but agreeing in nothing else. Paul was willing to lose all personal honour, though, in truth, not a whit behind the chief of the apostles. He said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." He cheerfully sank that his Lord might be exalted.

Moreover, in those days there was a great liking among the people, especially those who thought themselves educated, for the Greek philosophers. They said to one another, "Have you studied Solon? Have you accepted the teaching of Socrates? Have you drank in the doctrines of the divine Plato? That is the man! In him there is depth of reasoning and breadth of thought. As for this Paul, he does not seem to care for the great masters of thought." "No," says Paul, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." They looked for philosophy and did not get it, and he did not mean they should. "But at least," they said, "what he has to say ought to be delivered with all the graces of oratory, after the best manner of the schools." "No," says Paul, "my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." If he had power among them, he determined that it should be the power of the Holy Ghost and no other power. The charms of oratory are but a poor and fickle force; tricks of language are a wretched sort of witchcraft. Instead of the coloured flames of fancy, Paul would let into their minds the pure white light of truth as it shines from the cross. Those things which were looked upon in those days as the chief instruments of power by which orators swayed human minds, Paul deliberately renounced, and relied on higher forces. He kept to the preaching of the cross, which was to them that perish foolishness, but to the saved the power of God. He put forward that side of the gospel which was most objectionable, so

that to the Jews it was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; he did this of design: for so the Lord worketh evermore, making his divine power more glorious in the absence of that which is thought to be power among men. The apostle as a Jew was full of ceremonial teaching, which was very powerful with Jews, but to this he died. As a man he was well trained and deeply educated in philosophy; but to that he died also, knowing nothing but the cross and the scandal thereof. As his Master saved men by his weakness on the cross, so did he save men by his word spoken in the apparent weakness of Paul.

And yet again I believe the apostle meant this: that though he might have come among them if he had liked and said, "I am an apostle; I have supreme power over churches; out of this church I shall eject offenders without any question; for I am among you as your spiritual director," yet he never used such authority: on the contrary he was the servant of all, patient to the last degree, gentle, humble, condescending, unselfish, fully consecrated. If any one was grieved, Paul was grieved with him; if any suffered trial, Paul was tried. He might have said, as his Master did, "I am among you as he that serveth." He did, after the divine example, continually wash the saints' feet. His was a humble manner, for he sought nothing of them but that he might lead them in the way of holiness and maintain peace in their midst. He was no lord over God's heritage, but the lowliest of them all. He hoped all things, endured all things, believed all things for the sake of those entrusted to his charge. Thus he was a power among them: his evident self-sacrifice made him have more influence at Corinth than all their proud leaders of division. By laying aside authority he became mighty to influence them for good. I desire to practise this lesson to perfection.

All of you, my brethren, who desire to be useful must learn that in self-sinking your usefulness will be found. Do not seek to be great; try to grow less and less. He who becomes least is greatest of all. The way to rise in the peerage of the church is to go down. Do not take what you have a right to take; do not covet the position which you feel you might righteously assume; but take the lowest room, do the meanest service, be willing to be anything or nothing so that God is glorified. Be ready to be stuck in any corner, or stowed away in any lumber-room, if such should be the will of God; and then the probability is that you will be largely and honourably used. The way to success in the kingdom is by a constant sense of personal unworthiness and weakness. "When I am weak, then am I strong." By death with Christ we come to live with him; by being crucified with him we reign; by perfect self-surrender we obtain all things; he that saveth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth it for Christ's sake shall find it both here and hereafter.

I think you see the apostle's drift, and how completely he answered all objections against himself grounded upon his apparent unimportance and weakness. It only remains for us to meet all such charges against ourselves in the same satisfactory manner.

II. I come in the next place to a very important matter, and that is THE SURE PROOF OF POWER: the indisputable evidence of any minister's call from God to preach the gospel.

Notice, the apostle says, "Since ye seek a proof of *Christ speaking in*

me." He did not care about what they thought of his own speaking: they might throw that to the dogs if they liked; but he was greatly concerned that they should not think lightly of the Lord Jesus who spoke in him. If Christ speaks by any one of us, it will ill become us to see him despised, and yet feel no sorrow. Brother, never care about your own speaking; but if it really is so that the Lord Jesus bears witness to this generation through you, then do not allow him to be rejected without entering your solemn protest.

A little further on the apostle declares that even the power of the living Christ is the power of God. Our Lord Jesus kept nothing to himself but his weakness through which he was crucified, for he liveth by the power of God. Such must be the power of every Christian worker: we are weak with him, but we shall live with him by the power of God towards those whom we bless. It was said the other day, "It is a wonderful power which a certain man possesses: we see no cause to account for it." That man will not be true to himself or his Lord if he ascribes that power to his own personal acquirements, for if it be true power it comes from that Spirit who distributeth to every man according to his will. Power belongeth unto God, and that is the case even when he puts a measure of it upon men. Let that be understood once for all.

Then, says Paul, "If you want a proof of Christ's speaking in me with power, look at yourselves." Paul says to his own Corinthian converts, "Ye are our epistle." If anybody enquires whether Paul can write, he does not exhibit his hand or his pen, but he points to their lives—epistles "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." Beloved, you who are our flocks are the evidences of our being good shepherds. Ye are God's husbandry, and the test of how far our husbandry has been the Lord's husbandry must be found in your fruitfulness. If you want to know whether Christ has spoken in me, I reply, "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you, examine yourselves." Our witness is in your hearts. The mighty power of the word of Christ has been proved within the arena of your experience, for it has moved you powerfully, influenced you wonderfully, and changed you supernaturally. What is more, it works in you still, for Christ is in you, "except ye be reprobates." Jesus abides in you, and the proof of our ministry is the effect it has had and still is having upon your minds. To put it more correctly, the proof that Christ really doth speak by us is that he has wrought by that speaking in you after such a fashion as proves the doctrine to be divine. Your souls are the seals of Christ's power. Standing here this morning, while yet the trumpets of joy have hardly ceased their silver sound; loving you, and blessing God for many of you who are the fruit of my labours, I feel upon my heart the burden of the Lord. In vain is all our mutual content in each other unless in very deed the gospel of God is confirmed and glorified in us. I feel constrained to say to you, beloved, that if the outside world demands a proof of my call from God, I must refer them to you for it; you to whom God has spoken by me, must be the witnesses whether it is of God or not, and if you fail me my commission will have lost its seal. The *imprimatur* which establishes our right to our holy office will be found in the influence of the gospel upon

your characters. Listen then a moment with such sympathy with me as your love will inspire.

If ye seek any proof of Christ speaking by me, ye have it, first, in your own *conversion*, many of you. You will have no doubt of the minister's call if his testimony has brought you life in Christ. After I had heard a poor plain man preach the gospel, and had been brought to the Saviour's feet by his testimony, if I had been met outside by a High Churchman, who thought that a working-man had no right to preach, I should have had small patience with him. Suppose he had said to me when I was just converted, "The man is not qualified to preach, he has never been to Oxford or Cambridge, he has never been ordained, God cannot have sent him," I should have smiled at such nonsense, for I was sure God sent him, since by his means I had been brought up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay. You never doubt the validity of the orders—that, I think, is the cant phrase—of the man who has led you to the Saviour. How could you? Whatever he may be to others, he is to you assuredly a messenger of mercy, a servant of the living God. "Give God the praise," they said to the man whose eyes had been opened by Jesus, "*we* know that this man is a sinner." "Ah," said the shrewd, ready-witted man, "whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." Was there any answer to that fact? In after days, when the chief priests and scribes saw the man that was healed standing with Peter and John, they could say nothing against them. The conversion proves that he by whose means it was wrought was sent by God. If I have been made useful to any of you, do not let me lose the reward of seeing you walk as those who are truly alive from the dead. Do not be fickle and unsteady, but continue in the faith grounded and settled, for he that endureth to the end the same shall be saved.

Further, God proves that he has sent a man by the *comfort* which he gives to true believers by his ministry. The servant of God expounds the exceeding great and precious promises; he describes the covenant of grace; he pictures the adorable person of the divine Lord; he bears testimony to the faithfulness of God and to the inward operation of the Holy Spirit, and in all this he ministers good cheer to the saints. Now, has it not happened to you while this has been done that your hearts have leaped within you? Have you not come into this place burdened, and while Jesus has been speaking to you have you not lost your load? Do not many of you go on from week to week with merry hearts because of the word of the Lord, which comes to you full of consolation? Well, then, whether it be I or any other preacher of the word, if by our speaking the Lord strengthens your weak hands and confirms your feeble knees, he points us out to you as messengers of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Oh, the riches of divine consolation! Have you tasted them? Then there is no disputing against taste; of all arguments that of experience is the most conclusive.

Further, when Christ, speaking in his servants, brings to us *correction*, it is an equal proof that it is of the Lord. You did not know it, but you had lived in the omission of a certain duty: light flashed into your soul by the hearing of the word as to that omission, and with that light came

love, so that you wept over your sin and ceased from it at once. Surely that was a proof of Christ's speaking in the minister. Have you not sometimes felt your hearts turned inside out, as if the spirit of burning were searching and purging you? Was not that of the Lord? Dagon sat upright enough in his own temple while he was left alone; but the ark of God was brought in, and by-and-by Dagon had to go down. There was a great smash; the Lord's ark had smitten him, and only the stump of Dagon was left. Has it not been so with you through the preaching of the word? We must all confess that Christ's voice has been like a winnowing fan to drive away our chaff. His truth has blown through us like a strong northern blast, and it has swept down the withered leaves of our fancies, conceits, and self-reliances. Our cry has been, "We all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." We have stood bare and leafless before God, and thereby we have been prepared for another spring to clothe us with a fresher and more enduring verdure. That use of the word for correction becomes a definite answer to the question, "What is the proof of Christ speaking in us?"

Then, dear friends, the general *conduct and conversation* of members of a church must always be the best recommendation of the ministry which feeds them. My heart sinks within me when I hear of those who have been numbered with us, and have shared our love and esteem, and yet have behaved inconsistently. Is this to be laid at my door? I confess I cannot help blaming myself, and growing sad. Did I not hear of an earnest Temperance man in public, drinking in private? Is this the fruit of my ministry? Ah me! Did I hear of another professor whose household is a scene of constant strife? Did I observe coldness and indifference creeping over others? Did I find a brother censorious and bitter? Is this the result of my labour? I could weep and break my heart. Do we hear of some that they are not upright and truthful in their dealings? Do people say, "These are members of Spurgeon's church"? I do not blame the world for so saying. It is only just that men should estimate our ministry by its results. We cannot help such judgments, nor do we repine at them. You are either our joy and crown, or else our sorrow and dishonour. You must estimate whether a man farms well by the crops which he raises. True, you cannot condemn him if a few thorns and thistles spring up in the hedgerows, because those things are so natural to the soil that they are there in no time; but if the acres are covered with thistles, if there is a preponderance of weeds, everybody says, "This is wretched farming." Farmers may make a great outcry about new machinery and artificial manures, but if there is no harvest it is poor work. Oh, dear sirs, by the love you bear to us, who labour for Christ among you, let your conversation be such as becometh the gospel of Christ. I cannot say this in words so emphatically as I desire to do. I should like to coin my heart in order to pass it round to you in living medallions, bearing each one this inscription—*for Jesus' sake be holy.*

Unless you are a holy people, it were better for me that I had never been born. Unless you follow Christ, and exhibit his spirit wherever you dwell, what is the good of all our preaching? We might as well have stood upon a mountain and whistled to the wind as have pleaded with

you unto tears. Unless there is a purity of life and a holiness of conversation in you as a church, I shall have sown dead seed. I think I can say faithfully that there is holiness among you; but oh, watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation! Let each one among you be upon his guard lest in some evil hour he should bring dishonour upon the cause he loves, upon the Christ by whom he lives. Men do not read the Bible, but they read *us*,—do let us give them a good version of the Scriptures in our lives. They will not study our doctrinal opinions, but they will examine our practical examples; and if we are not what we ought to be we wound the Saviour afresh, stab at the heart of his gospel, and impede the progress of his kingdom. Oh, blessed Master, the faults of thy disciples are no faults of thine, and yet the world lays them all on thee! Thou art all holiness and goodness, and yet thou hast to bear blame for thine erring followers! Truly, my brethren, those of us who work for the great Master need not be at all surprised if we, too, have to take our share of the dishonour brought upon us by thoughtless or untruthful men. If Judas sins John grieves; it must be so. God set to our ministry this attesting seal—that you may be a peculiar people, zealous for good works.

Again, dear friends, whenever the Word of God comes to your heart so that you *consecrate* yourselves wholly unto God and go forth and live the life of dedication, then you give proof of Christ speaking in us. When your zeal burns, when your hearts bleed for the perishing, when you speak by the power of the Holy Ghost who has filled you, when you go forth and work wonders by instructing the ignorant, impressing the careless, and guiding the wanderers to Christ, then again I can say, seek ye a proof of Christ speaking by me? You are my witnesses inasmuch as by our word you have been stirred up to speak in the power of the Holy Ghost for the winning of souls.

There is one more operation of God's word about which I can speak with very great comfort to my own self, and that is the operation of the word in the *completion* of the Christian character, and in the display of it in the last hours of Christian men and women. I have come down many times from the sick chamber of those members of this church who are now in the upper house, and I have done so with faith confirmed and joy increased. Those beloved ones have given me more strength and assurance than I ever derived from the study of the ablest works in my library. They were sometimes very poor, but I remember well the glory of the little room wherein they were disrobing for the beatific vision. Their heavenly serenity, varied with bursts of triumphant joy, has driven all my fears away. Some have been wasted with disease and racked with pain till it seemed impossible that an original thought could have come from them, and yet their speech has been fresh and new, an inspired utterance far excelling poetry. They only spoke what they were seeing, what they were enjoying, for the jewelled gates were set open to them, and they peered within and then turned round and told us a little of what they saw. It has been a glorious thing to find none of them trembling, none confounded, none wavering. No dying man has looked me in the face and said, "Sir, you did not preach a religion which a man can die with; you taught me doctrines which are not substantial enough for the dying hour." No, I feel even now their death grips, as they

have clasped my hand and told me of their overflowing joy. They have said to me, "Bless the Lord that ever I stepped into the Tabernacle to hear of justification by faith, of the divine substitution, of atonement made by blood, and of a faithful God who casts not away his people!" Such expressions I have heard from those upon the borders of Immanuel's land. These are our seals and the tokens that Christ has spoken by us.

Go ye and speak, my beloved brethren in the ministry here to-day, with great confidence, for I doubt not you have the same assuring proofs. You that teach in the school, or in any way set forth Christ, be sure that God will confirm his own truth with signs following. He keeps an office open for setting the royal stamp on all truth that is earnestly proclaimed,—proclaimed in weakness, but with true evidences of power, because mighty in those who believe it.

I hope you will bear with me in thus speaking of what has so plain a relation to myself; but truly these many years God has wrought among us great marvels of grace, and I am overwhelmed when I imagine even for a moment what we should do if the Spirit of God were to withdraw. You will not turn your backs in the day of battle, will you? God will help you, and keep you steadfast in the faith once delivered to the saints, and he will help you to be a holy people, walking in your integrity; will he not? May he make all our people to be holy, for if not I shall have to go back to him with many cries, for God will have humbled me among you, and I shall have to bewail those who have sinned. Alas for a ministry so publicly known if it be publicly dishonoured. Alas for the people of the living God if traitors cause them disquietude. O church in this Tabernacle, "hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"!

III. To each one of us there is A NEEDED PROOF OF OURSELVES. Hence the text says, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith." It is something to have our ministry attested, but it is much more to have your salvation attested. Dear fellow-believers, observe that you can know whether you are saved or not: assurance, ay, full assurance is within your grasp; but it is only to be obtained by a simple faith, and by a sincere and thorough examination of yourselves.

Observe, the apostle says "examine yourselves"; therefore you are not to take it for granted that you are saved: if you do, you may be sadly mistaken. "Examine yourselves." In London years ago every shop had its sign, and they had a saying that the house which had the sign of the sun in a certain street was darker than any other: all their sun was outside: it had the sun for a sign but no sign of the sun. So there are some who have grace for their sign, but no sign of grace. God grant we may not be such. To have a name to live is a wretched thing if we be really dead. In such a case we are nothing but living lies, devout deceits, bastard professors, in a word "reprobates." To pretend to be other than what we are in the sight of the heart-searching God is despicable and damnable.

The Spirit of God by the mouth of the apostle bids us "examine *ourselves*." Of course we are to examine our lives, but he goes further, and says, "Examine yourselves." Sin within will ruin even if it be not seen in act. Of course we are to examine our doctrines, but even more

we are to examine *ourselves*. Heart error is more deadly than head error. Self-examination has not to do with garments but with the man himself. Yes, you did pray very prettily; but was that prayer out of yourself? Yes, sir, it was an admirable sermon and apparently very earnest, but is it your soul's utterance, or only a parrot lesson? "Examine yourselves," your own real persons, as in the presence of the Most High.

Supposing you have done this, then do it again; for the next sentence is, "Prove your own selves." Pry deeper, thrust the lancet in further. You have already given yourself a good sifting; take a finer sieve and go to work again. You have already been in the crucible:—go in again, and become as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times. A man cannot make too sure work about his own salvation. "Oh, but," someone says, "I never doubted my own safety." Remember,—

> "Who never doubted of his state,
> He may, perhaps he may, too late."

One stands up and has the impudence to say, "I never sin." Sit down, sir, do not dream that you are among fools; we know better. You may hold your fond conceit if you please, but meanwhile we pray for you; the Lord open your eyes to see the sin in you, for pride is blinding you, its scales are upon your eyes. "In many things we offend all." "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." What man is he that doeth good and sinneth not?

We must again and again examine ourselves. But can we not be certain of our safety? Yes, we can: but certain because we have not shunned the most rigorous self-examinations. If you do not test yourself you may sit down and say, "Oh, I am all right." Yes, but you may be fostering within your spirit a peace which will end in your final ruin, and you may never open your eyes to your deception till you lift them up in hell. Be ready to be searched. It is well when a man likes a heart-searching ministry, when he says, "Cut deep, sir; do not spare me; if I am a hypocrite let me know it." I like a man whose prayer is, "Lord, let me know the worst of myself, that I may be upright before thee. Search me and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." This is what we want. This is the age of shams, sham preaching, and sham hearing, and sham professors: we must strive after realities. There are such things as common graces, which will not save, and, worse still, such things as counterfeit graces, which will destroy; therefore, let us see to it that we first examine and then prove ourselves.

And what is to be the point of search? "Whether ye be in the faith," whether what ye believe is true, and whether you truly believe it; whether your faith is the faith of God's elect: the faith that is of the operation of the Spirit of God, or mere nominal, notional, temporary faith. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith."

Dwell mostly on this point, "Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Is Jesus Christ in you? I know all about him. Yes, but is he in you? I read of him.

Read on, but is he in you? Come, friends, let us each one put this question to himself, "Is Jesus formed and living in my heart?"

"There is life in a look at the Crucified One."

But you have not looked at him unless he has come to live in you; the first glance of the eye that sends the soul to Christ also sends Christ to the soul. That man is not in Christ who has not Christ in him. Do you have to go a long way to get at Christ? Then you may well tremble; for with true saints Christ is at home, formed in them, the hope of glory. Except you be counterfeits to be rejected and thrown away as slag of the furnace, Christ is in you at this very moment. This is very heart-searching; let it search your hearts.

Within a short time, and none of us know how soon, our Lord will come; quick ears can hear the rolling of his chariots. Perhaps before that you and I may be called away; are we ready? I do not often enter this place without being told, "So-and-so is gone." I cannot help looking upon this vast congregation as moving along in procession to the tomb: I am also myself marching with you. We are all going together, and we shall meet together at the judgment-seat of Christ. I would not have you say in that day, "We came to hear you, and you did us no good, for you tickled our ears, and tried to play the orator." I never did anything of the sort. I do protest it before the living God I never thought of such a thing. I have striven to strike straight at your hearts and consciences. You shall not say that of me either here or hereafter. But when we meet in the judgment you will say, "It was power in weakness; Christ spoke in you, we were converted, comforted, and sanctified by him." Ah, we shall meet, brothers, we shall meet on the other side of Jordan, in the land of the hereafter, in the city of the blessed; we shall meet and sing together to the praise and glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved!

The Lord be with you all for his name's sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Corinthians xii., xiii. 1—6.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—178, 119 (Part II.), 639.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 6TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Joseph of Arimathæa, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre."—Mark xv. 43—46.

IT was a very dark day with the church of God and with the cause of Christ; for the Lord Jesus was dead, and so the sun of their souls had set. "All the disciples forsook him, and fled." "Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone," were the sad words of Jesus, and they had come true. He was dead upon the cross, and his enemies hoped that there was an end of him, while his friends feared that it was even so. A few women who had remained about the cross, true to the very last, were found faithful unto death; but what could they do to obtain his sacred body and give it honourable burial? That priceless flesh seemed to be in danger of the fate which usually awaited the bodies of malefactors: at any rate, the fear was that it might be hurled into the first grave that could be found to shelter it. At that perilous moment Joseph of Arimathæa, a city of the Jews, of whom we never heard before, and of whom we never hear again, suddenly made his appearance. He was the very man needed for the occasion, a man of influence, a man possessing that kind of influence which was most potent with Pilate—a rich man, a counsellor, a member of the Sanhedrim, a person of weight and character. Every evangelist mentions him and tells us something about him, and from these we learn that he was a disciple, "a good man and a just; who also himself waited for the kingdom of God." Joseph had been retiring, and probably cowardly before; but now he came to the cross, and saw how matters stood, and then went in boldly unto Pilate, craved the body of Jesus, and obtained it. Let us learn from this that God will always have his witnesses. It matters not though the ministry should forsake the truth, though they that should be leaders should become recreant, the truth of God will not fail for lack of friends. It may be with the church as when a standard-bearer fainteth and the host is ready to melt with dismay; but there shall be found other standard-bearers,

and the banner of the Lord shall wave over all. As the Lord liveth, so shall his truth live: as God reigneth, so shall the gospel reign, even though it be from the cross. "Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord reigneth from the tree." Such is a singular version of a verse in the Psalms, and it contains a glorious truth. Even while Jesus hangeth on the cross in death he is still keeping possession of the throne, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Let this be remembered for your encouragement in the cloudy and dark day. If you live in any place where the faithful fail from among men, do not wring your hands in grief and sit down in despair, as though it was all over with the cause you love. The Lord liveth, and he will yet keep a faithful seed alive in the earth. Another Joseph of Arimathæa will come forward at the desperate moment: just when we cannot do without him the man will be found. There was a Joseph for Israel in Egypt, and there was a Joseph for Jesus on the cross. A Joseph acted to him a father's part at his birth, and another Joseph arranged for his burial. The Lord shall not be left without friends. There was a dark day in the Old Testament history when the eyes of Eli, the servant of God, had failed him; and worse still, he was almost as blind mentally as physically; for his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. It seemed as if God must forsake his Israel. But who is this little boy who is brought in by his mother? this tiny child who is to be left in the sanctuary to serve his God as long as he liveth? this pretty little man who wears the little coat which his mother's hands have lovingly made for him? Look, ye that have eyes of faith; for the prophet Samuel is before you, the servant of the Lord, by whose holy example Israel shall be led to better things, and delivered from the oppression which chastised the iniquities of Eli's sons.

God hath to-day somewhere, I know not where, in yon obscure cottage of an English village, or in a log-hut far away in the backwoods of America, or in the slums of our back streets, or in our palaces, a man who in maturer life shall deliver Israel, fighting the battles of the Lord. The Lord hath his servant making ready, and when the time shall come, when the hour shall want the man, the man shall be found for the hour. The Lord's will shall be done, let infidels and doubters think what they please. I see in this advent of Joseph of Arimathæa exactly at the needed time, a well of consolation for all who have the cause of God laid upon their hearts. We need not worry our heads about who is to succeed the pastors and evangelists of to-day: the apostolical succession we may safely leave with our God.

Concerning this Joseph of Arimathæa, the honourable counsellor, I want to speak this morning, praying that I may speak to your souls all along. As I have already said, we hear no more of Joseph than what is recorded here. He shines out when he is wanted, and anon he disappears: his record is on high. We need not mention the traditions about him, for I think that even the quotation of legends has an evil tendency, and may turn us aside from the pure, unadulterated Word of God. What have you and I to do with tradition? Is not the Scripture enough? There is probably no truth in the silly tales about Joseph and Glastonbury; and if there were, it could be of no consequence to us; if any fact had been worthy of the pen of inspiration, it would have been

written, and because it is not written, we need not desire to know. Let us be satisfied to pause where the Holy Spirit stays his pen.

I shall use Joseph of Arimathæa this morning in four ways: first, as *our warning*,—he was a disciple of Jesus, "but secretly for fear of the Jews;" secondly, for *our instruction*,—he was at last brought out by the cross, concerning which holy Simeon had declared that by the death of the Lord Jesus the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed; thirdly, for *our arousing*,—there was an occasion for Joseph to come forward, and there is occasion now for all the timid to grow brave; and lastly, for *our guidance*,—that we may, if we have been at all bashful and fearful, come forward in the hour of need and behave ourselves as bravely as Joseph of Arimathæa did on the eve before the Paschal Sabbath.

I. First, then, I desire to look at Joseph of Arimathæa as OUR WARNING. He was a disciple of Christ, but secretly, for fear of the Jews: we do not advise any one of you to imitate Joseph in that. Fear which leads us to conceal our faith is an evil thing. Be a disciple by all means, but not secretly: you miss a great part of your life's purpose if you are. Above all, do not be a disciple secretly because of the fear of man; for the fear of man bringeth a snare. If you are the slave of such fear it demeans you, be-littles you, and prevents your giving due glory to God.

> "Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
> Have nothing else to fear."

Be careful to give honour to Christ and he will take care of your honour. Why was it that Joseph of Arimathæa was so backward? Perhaps it was owing to *his natural disposition*. Many men are by nature very bold; some are a little too much so, for they become intrusive, self-assertive, not to say impudent. I have heard of a certain class of persons who "rush in where angels fear to tread." They are fearless because they are brainless. Let us avoid fault in that direction. Many, on the other hand, are too retiring: they have to screw their courage up even to say a good word for the Saviour whom they love. If they can do so they fall into the rear rank; they hope to be found among the victors when they divide the spoil, but they are not over ambitious to be among the warriors while they are braving the foe. Some of these are true-hearted notwithstanding their timidity. It was found in the martyr days that certain of those who endured most bravely at the stake were naturally of a fearful mind. It is noted by Foxe that some who boasted of how well they could bear pain and death for Christ turned tail and recanted; while others who in prison trembled at the thought of the fire, played the man in death, to the admiration of all that were round about them. Still, dear friends, it is not a desirable thing if you are troubled with timidity to foster it at all. Fear of man is a plant to be rooted up, and not to be nurtured. I should set that plant, if I could, where it would get but little water, and no sunshine, and meanwhile I would beg a cutting from a better tree. Would it not be well often to brace ourselves with such a hymn as this—

> "Am I a soldier of the cross,
> A follower of the Lamb?
> And shall I fear to own his cause,
> Or blush to speak his name?

"Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease;
While others fought to win the prize,
And sail'd through bloody seas?"

If you know that your temptation lies in the direction of fear, watch and strive against it, and school yourselves evermore to dauntless courage by the help of the Holy Spirit.

I am afraid, too, that what helped to intimidate Joseph of Arimathæa was the fact that he was *a rich man*. A sad truth lies within our Lord's solemn exclamation, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God." Riches do not strengthen the heart, or make men daring for the good cause. Albeit wealth is a great talent which may be well used by the man who has entered into the kingdom of heaven, yet it brings with it snares and temptations, and when a man has not yet entered into the kingdom it is, in many ways, a terrible hindrance to his entrance. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom." The fishermen of the Galilean Lake readily left their bits of boats, and their fishing-tackle; but Joseph of Arimathæa was a rich man, and was therefore slow to leave all for Christ's sake. The tendency of great possessions is seen in the case of the young man who turned away in sorrow from the Lord Jesus, when put to the unusual test of selling all he had. Strong swimmers have saved their lives when the ship has struck upon a rock, by casting aside every weight; while others have gone straight down to the bottom because they have bound their gold around their waists. Gold sinks men as surely as lead. Take care, any of you that are well to do in this world, that you do not permit the liberality of God to be a cause of disloyalty to him. Beware of the pride of life, the lust for rank, the desire to hoard; for any of these may prevent your service of your Lord. Riches puff men up, and prevent their stooping to find the pearl of great price. A poor man enters a humble village sanctuary where Christ is preached, and he finds eternal life; another man under concern of soul in the same village does not like to go down to the poor conventicle, and remains unblest. He keeps away because he puts to himself the question, "What will the people say if the squire goes to hear the gospel? What a stir there will be if the son of a lord is converted!" Joseph of Arimathæa's wealth made him unduly cautious; and possibly, without his knowing it, prevented his casting in his lot with the common sort of people who followed the Lord Jesus. His heart was for the prize, but the heavy weight of his substance hindered him in his race; it was an instance of abounding grace that he was helped to run well at the last.

Possibly, too, he may have been checked by the fact that *he was in office, and that he was honourable in it.* It needs great grace to carry human honour; and, truth to tell, it is not particularly much worth carrying when you have it. For what is fame but the breath of men's nostrils? Poor stuff to feed a soul upon! If a man could so live as to gain universal plaudits, if he could write his name athwart the sky in letters of gold, what of it all? What is there in the applause of a thoughtless multitude? The approbation of good men, if it be gained by persevering virtue, is better to be desired than great riches; but even

then it may become a temptation; for the man may begin to question rather, What will people say? than, What will God say? and the moment he falls into that mood he has introduced a weakening element into his life. The "Well done, good and faithful servant," of the Master's own lip is worth ten thousand thunders of applause from senators and princes. Honour among men is, at best, a peril to the best. Joseph was honoured in council, and this is apt to make a man prudently slow. The tendency of office is towards caution rather than enthusiasm. I would have those placed in high positions remember this, and candidly judge themselves as to whether their shrinking from the public avowal of Christ may not be a cowardice unworthy of the position in which the Lord has placed them.

It seems clear that all the earthly things which men covet may not be so desirable as they appear to be; and that which men would give their eyes to procure, they might, if their eyes were opened, think far less of.

I would lovingly enquire of you at this time (for the sermon is meant to be personal all the way through) if any of you who love my Lord and Master are doing so secretly because of the fear of men. You have never openly confessed your faith, and why not? What doth hinder your taking up a decided position on the Lord's side? Are you wealthy? Are you honourable? Do you occupy an enviable position in society? And are you such a mean-spirited creature that you have become proud of these glittering surroundings, like a child that is vain of its new frock? Are you so craven that you will not cast in your lot with the followers of truth and righteousness because they are persons of low degree? Are you really so base? Is there no holy chivalry in you? Can it be so, that, because God has dealt so well with you, and trusted you so generously, you will repay him by denying his Son, violating your conscience, and turning your back on truth; and all for the sake of being in the fashion? I know it may seem hard to receive the cold shoulder in society, or to have the finger of scorn pointed at you; but to bow before this selfish dread is scarcely worthy of a man, and utterly disgraceful to a Christian man. "Oh, but I am so retiring in disposition." Yes, but do not indulge it, I pray you; for, if all were of such a mind, where were the noble advances of truth, her reformations, her revivals? Where would have been our Luther, or our Calvin, or our Zwingle? where would have been our Whitefield, or our Wesley, if they had thought it to be the main object of desire to walk at ease along the cool sequestered vale of life? Come forth, my brother, for the truth and for the Lord. Recollect that what is right for you would be right for the rest of us: if you do not join the Christian church, for instance, every one of us might also neglect that duty, and where would be the visible church of Christ, and how would the ordinances of our holy faith be kept up as a witness among the sons of men? I charge all concealed believers to think over the inconsistency of their concealment and to quit that cowardly condition.

I feel sure that Joseph of Arimathæa was a great loser by his secrecy; for you see, he did not live with Jesus, as many other disciples did. During that brief but golden period in which men walked and talked, and ate and drank with Jesus, Joseph was not with him. He was not among the twelve: as possibly he might have been if he had possessed more courage

and decision. He lost many of those familiar talks with which the Lord indulged his own after the multitudes had been sent away. He missed that sacred training and strengthening which fitted men for the noble lives of primitive saints. How many opportunities he must have missed, too, of working for the Master and with the Master! Perhaps we hear no more of him because he had done no more. Possibly that one grand action which has redeemed his name from forgetfulness, is all that is recorded because it really was all that was worth recording. Joseph must have been a weaker, a sadder, a less useful man for having followed Christ afar off. I would to God that such reflections as these would fetch out our beloved, truly faithful and honourable Christian men, who hitherto have hidden away among the stuff, and have not come to the front to stand up for Jesus.

II. Secondly, having viewed Joseph of Arimathæa as a warning, I shall go on to speak of him as a lesson for OUR INSTRUCTION.

Joseph did come out after all; and so will you, my friends. If you are honest and sincere, you will have to avow your Lord sooner or later. Do you not think it would be better to make it sooner rather than later? The day will come when that shame which you are now dreading will be yours. As surely as you are a sincere believer, you will have to encounter that reproach and derision which now alarm you: why not face them at once and get it over? You will have to confess Christ before many witnesses, why not begin to do so at once? What is the hardship of it? It will come easier to you, and it will bring you a larger blessing, and it will be sweeter in the recollection afterwards, than if you keep on postponing it. What was it that fetched Joseph of Arimathæa out? *It was the power of the cross!* Is it not a remarkable thing that all the life of Christ did not draw out an open avowal from this man? Our Lord's miracles, his marvellous discourses, his poverty, and self-renunciation, his glorious life of holiness and benevolence, all may have helped to build up Joseph in his secret faith, but it did not suffice to develop in him a bold avowal of faith. The shameful death of the cross had greater power over Joseph than all the beauty of Christ's life. Now let us see, you timid, backward ones, whether the cross will not have the same influence over you to-day. I believe it will if you carefully study it. I am sure it will if the Holy Spirit lays it home to your heart. I suppose that to Joseph of Arimathæa Christ's death on the cross seemed such *a wicked thing* that he must come out on behalf of one so evil entreated. He had not consented to the deed of the men of the Sanhedrim when they condemned Jesus to death; probably he and Nicodemus withdrew themselves from the assembly altogether; but when he saw that the crime was actually committed, and that the innocent man had been put to death, then he said, "I cannot be a silent witness of such a murder. I must now side with the holy and the just." Therefore he came out, and was found the willing servant of his crucified Master. Come what may of it, he felt that he must own himself to be on the right side, now that they had maliciously taken away the life of the Lord Jesus. It was late, it was sadly late, but it was not too late. Oh, secret disciple, will you not quit your hiding-place? Will you not hasten to do so? You who are quiet and retiring, when you hear the name of Jesus blasphemed, as it is in these evil days, will you not stand

up for him? When you hear his Deity denied, when his headship in the church is given to another, when his very person is by lewd fellows of the baser sort set up as the target of their criticism, will you not speak up for him? Will you not be shocked by such evil conduct into an open avowal? His cause is that of truth and righteousness, and mercy and hope for the sons of men, therefore he must not be abused while you sit by in silence. Had others favoured him you might, perhaps, have been somewhat excused for holding back; but you cannot keep back without grievous sin now that so many deride him. Jesus is worthy of all honour, and yet they heap scorn upon him: will you not defend him? He is your Saviour and Lord; oh, be not slow to own that you are his. The cross laid bare the heart of Joseph; he loathed the wickedness which slew the Holy and the Just, and therefore he girded himself to become the guardian of his sacred body.

But, next, it may have been in part *the wonderful patience of the Master's death* which made Joseph feel he could not hide any longer. Did he hear him say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"? Did he mark him when those blessed lips said, "I thirst"? Do you think he observed the ribaldry and scorn which surrounded the dying Lord? and did he feel that the stones would cry out if he did not show kindness to his best friend? Since Jesus spake not for himself, but was dumb as a sheep before her shearers, Joseph is bound to open his mouth for him. If Jesus answered not, but only breathed out prayers for his murderers, the honourable counsellor must acknowledge him. The sun has owned him, and veiled his face in sackcloth! The earth has owned him, and trembled to her very heart at his sufferings! Death has owned him, and yielded up the bodies which the sepulchre had hitherto detained! The temple has owned him, and in its horror has rent its veil, like a woman that is utterly broken in heart by the horrors she has seen! Therefore Joseph must own him, he cannot resist the impulse. Oh, brethren, if you have been backward, let some such motive lead you unto the van of the host.

Then there were all *the wonders of that death* which he saw, and to which I have already alluded. They sufficed to convince the centurion that this was a righteous man. They convinced others that he was the Son of God; and he who was already a disciple of Christ must have been greatly confirmed in that conviction by what he saw around the cross. The time was come when he must boldly act as Christ's disciple. Have there been no wonders of conversion around you? no answers to prayer? no providential deliverances? Should not these lead the secret ones to declare themselves?

I do not suppose he fully understood *the design of our Lord's death;* he had some knowledge of it, but not such a knowledge as we have now that the Spirit of God has appeared in all his fulness, and taught us the meaning of the cross. Oh, listen, sirs, ye that are not upon his side openly, ye that have never worn his livery, nor manifestly entered on his service. He died for you! Those wounds were all for you; that bloody sweat, of which you still may see the marks upon the countenance of the Crucified, was all for you. For you the thirst and fever, for you the bowing of the head, and the giving up of the ghost; and can you be ashamed to own him? Will you not endure rebuke and scorn for

his dear sake who bore all this for you? Now speak from your soul and say, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." If you cannot say that, you cannot be happy; but if you can, then what follows? Must you not love him, and give yourself for him? The cross is a wondrous magnet, drawing to Jesus every man of the true metal. It is as a banner lifted on high, to which all who are loyal must rally. This fiery cross, carried through all lands, will rouse the valiant and speed them to the field. Can you see your Lord suffering to the death for you, and then turn your backs? I pray you may no longer hesitate, but may at once cry, "Set down my name among his followers; for I will fight it out even to the end, till I hear him say—

> 'Come in, come in;
> Eternal glory thou shalt win.'"

Thus much by way of instruction taken from the life of Joseph of Arimathæa. If the cross does not bring a man out, what will? If the spectacle of dying love does not quicken us into courageous affection for him, what can?

III. So I have to mention, in the third place, something for OUR AROUSING. Perhaps you are saying in your heart that the season in which Joseph lived was one which imperatively demanded that he should leave his hiding-place and should go in to Pilate, but that you are under no such constraint. Hearken, friends; many people are not true to their occasions, whatever they may be; they do not consider that they have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. The Lord Jesus is not hanging on a cross to-day needing to be buried; but other stern necessities exist, and call for your exertions. This hour's necessities imperiously demand that every man who is right at heart should acknowledge his Lord and do him service. Every man that loves Christ should at this hour prove it by his actions. A buoy off the Mumbles in South Wales bears a bell which is meant to warn mariners of a dangerous rock. This bell is quiet enough in ordinary weather; but when the winds are out, and the great waves rush in towards the shore, its solemn tones are heard for miles around as it swings to and fro in the hands of the sea. I believe there are true men who are silent when everything is calm, who will be forced to speak when the wild winds are out. Permit me to assure you that a storm is raging now, and it is growing worse and worse. If I rightly read the signs of the times, it is meet that every bell should ring out its warning note lest souls be lost upon the rocks of error. You that have fallen behind because the fighting did not seem to require you, must quit your positions of ease. I summon you in the Master's name to the war. The Lord hath need of you. If you come not to his help against the mighty a curse will light upon you. Ye must either be written across the back as *craven cowards*, or else you will to-day solemnly espouse the cause of Jesus. Shall I tell you why?

I will tell you why Joseph was wanted, and that was, just because *Christ's enemies had at last gone too far*. When they hunted him about and took up stones to stone him they went a very long way; when they said he had a devil and was mad they went much too far; when they asserted that he cast out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the

devils, that was a piece of blasphemy; but now, now they have overstepped the line most fatally; they have actually taken the King of Israel and nailed him up to a cross, and he is dead; and therefore Joseph cannot stand it any longer. He quits their company and joins himself to the Lord Jesus. See how far men are going in these days. In the outside world we have infidelity of so gross, so brutish, a character, that it is unworthy of the civilization, much less of the Christianity, of our age. Now, ye fearful ones, come out, and refuse to be numbered with the unbelieving world. Besides, in the outward Christian church we see men who, having already taken away every doctrine that we hold dear, are now assailing the inspiration of God's own word. They tell us plainly that they do not believe what the Scriptures say further than they choose to do. The Bible to them is a fine book, but rather out of date. Now, if you can be quiet, I cannot. The citadel of Christendom is now attacked. Let no brave man shrink from its defence. If you can hold your tongues, and see the faith rent to pieces, I cannot. Why, it is enough to make every man gird on his weapon and rush to the fight. Years ago, when they talked of the French invading England, an old lady grew very indignant, and threatened deadly resistance. When she was asked what the women of England could do, she said they would rise to a man. I have no doubt whatever that they would do their best in any such emergency. Every iron in the fire-place, whether it be poker or shovel, would be grasped to defend our hearths and homes; and just so now, when error knows no bounds, we must stand up for the defence of the truth. Since they push error to extremes, it becomes us to hold by every particle of the faith. I will not, for my own part, give up a corner of my creed for any man. Even if we might have been prepared to modify expressions had the age been different, we are not in that mood now. A generation of vipers shall have a naked file to bite at. We will modify nothing. If truth bears a stern aspect we will not veil it. If there be an offence in the cross we will not conceal it. This shall be my answer to those who would have us attune ourselves to the spirit of the age,—I know no Spirit but one, and he is unchanging in every age. Your extravagance of doubt shall have no influence over us except to make us bind the gospel more closely to our hearts. If we gave you an inch you would take a mile, and so no inch shall be given you. Our resolve is to live for the Book as we read it, for the gospel as we rest in it, for the Lord as he made atonement, for the kingdom as it ruleth over all. I beg every trembling Christian to take heart, put on his Lord's livery, and advance to the fray. Come out now, if you never did before! Come out, if there is any manliness in you, in these days of blasphemy and rebuke.

> "Ye that are men, now serve him,
> Against unnumber'd foes;
> Your courage rise with danger,
> And strength to strength oppose."

When Joseph of Arimathæa revealed himself as our Lord's disciple, *our Lord's friends had mostly fled*—we might almost say they had all departed. Then Joseph said, "I will go in and beg for the body." When everybody else runs away, then the timid man grows brave; and

often have I noticed it, that when there has been a wide desertion from the faith, then the feeble have become strong. Those poor souls who had said, "We hardly know whether we are the people of God at all, we are so unworthy," have crept out of their dens and have waxed valiant in fight, putting to flight the armies of the aliens. A sister was asked to tell her experience before the church, and she could not do it; but as she went away she turned round and said, "I cannot speak for Christ, but I could die for him." "Come back," said the minister, "you are welcome here!" They do gloriously, those hidden ones, in days whereof we are apt to fear that no witness for the truth will remain alive. Oh, that you who live where religion is declining may be all the more resolved to serve the Lord Jesus faithfully!

And then, you know, in Joseph's time *the people that were true to the Lord Jesus were such a feeble company.* Those that were not absolutely poor—the women that could minister to him of their substance—were nevertheless unable to go in unto Pilate and beg for the Lord's body. He would not have received them, and if he would they were too timid to have sought an interview; but Joseph is rich, and a counsellor, and therefore he seemed to say, "These dear good women need a friend; they cannot get that precious body down from the cross alone. I will go to the Roman governor. Together with Nicodemus, I will provide the linen and the spices, and the women shall help us take Jesus down from the tree and lay him in my new tomb, and swathe his limbs in linen and spices, so as to embalm him honourably." Some of you live in country towns where those who are faithful to God are very poor, and have not much ability among them. If anything should move you to be the more decided, it should be that fact. It is a brave thing to help a feeble company; any common people will follow at the heels of success, but the true man is not ashamed of a despised cause when it is the cause of truth. You who have talent and substance should say, "I will go and help them now. I cannot leave the Master's cause to this feeble folk. I know they do their best, and as that is little, I will join them and lay myself out to aid them for my great Master's sake."

Can you not see my drift? My only desire this morning is to induce any of you who have for a moment faltered to "stand up, stand up for Jesus," and everywhere, in every place as wisdom may suggest, avow his dear and sacred name. Perhaps you are flowers that cannot bloom till the light is darkened, like the night-blooming cereus or the evening primrose. Now is your hour. The evening is already come; bloom, my dear friends, and fill the air with the delightful fragrance of your love. When other flowers are closed, take care to open to the dew. In these dark hours shine out, ye stars! The sun has gone, else might ye lie hid; but now let us see you! Joseph and Nicodemus had never been seen in the daylight when Jesus was alive; but when the sun was set through his death, then their radiance beamed at its full. Oh, my hesitating brother, now is your time and your hour: boldly avail yourself of it, for our great Master's sake!

IV. Lastly, there is something in this subject for OUR GUIDANCE. Somebody says, "Well, what do you mean by my coming out? I can see what Joseph did: what am I to do? I do not live at Arimathæa, and there is no Pilate in these days."

Joseph in owning his Lord *put himself under personal risk*. A Christian slave, whose master was executed for being a Christian, went to the judge, and begged the body of his master that he might bury it. The judge replied, "Wherefore do you wish for your master's body?" "Because he was a Christian, and I am one." Upon this confession he was himself condemned to die. It might have been so with Pilate; for the Jewish rulers must have hated Joseph and longed for his death. He had been backward a long time, but now he put his life in his hand, and went in boldly to Pilate. We read, "He craved the body of Jesus"; but, as a commentator well says, he was not a craven, though he craved the body. He simply asked for it, begged for it, implored to have it, and the procurator yielded to his wish. Now, do you think that if it were needful for you to jeopardize your best earthly interests for Christ, you could do it? Could you lose your character for culture and courage by avowing the old faith in these apostate days? Can you leave all for Jesus? Should it rend the fondest connection, should it break up the brightest prospects, could you take up the cross and follow your Lord? It is due to him who died for you that you should count the cost, and reckon it little enough for his dear sake if you may but do him honour.

Remember, again, that this good man, Joseph of Arimathæa, when he took the body of Jesus, brought upon himself *ceremonial pollution*. It may seem little enough to you, but to a Jew it was a great deal, especially during the Passover week. He handled that blessed body, and defiled himself in the judgment of the Jews. But, oh, I warrant you he did not think it any defilement to touch the blessed person of his Lord, even when the life was gone out of that matchless frame. Nor was it any pollution. It was an honour to touch that holy thing, that body prepared of God. Yet they will say to you, if you come out for Christ and unite with his people, that you lower yourself. They will point at you, give you some opprobrious name, and charge you with fanaticism. Take upon yourself this blessed shame, and say, as David did, "I will be yet more vile." Dishonour for Christ is honour, and shame for him is the very top of all glory. You will not stand back, I trust, but you will come forward and avow your faith, though you thus become as the offscouring of all things.

And then, this man having risked his life, and given up his honour, was content to be *at great cost for the burial of Christ*. He went and bought the fine linen; and that rock-hewn sepulchre which it was the ambition of every Israelite to possess, he cheerfully resigned, that the Lord might lie there. Now, whenever you do own Christ, own him practically. Do not keep back your purse from him, or think that you are to say, "I am his," and do nothing for him. I was reading the story of a good old deacon in Maine, in America, who came in to a meeting after there had been a missionary collection. The minister there and then asked "our good brother Sewell" to pray. Sewell did not pray, but thrust his hand in his pocket and stood fumbling about. "Bring the box," he said; and when the box came, and he had put his money into it, the minister said, "Brother Sewell, I did not ask you to give anything, I only wished you to pray." "Oh," said he, "I could not pray till I had first given something." He felt obliged first to do something for the great mission work, and having done that he could pray for it. Oh, that

all Christ's people felt the justice of that course of conduct! Is it not most natural and proper? Joseph could not, when the Saviour wanted burying, have been true to him without burying him. And now that the Saviour does not want burying, but wants in all his living power to be preached among the sons of men, if we love him we must do all that lieth in us to spread the knowledge of his name. Come out then, come out then, ye that are hidden among the stuff! Some of you strangers from the country, who have lived in the village, and attended the services, but never joined the church, do not let another Sunday dawn till you have sent in your name to be classed with the people of God. And any of you that have come often to the Tabernacle, and say that nobody has spoken to you, just you speak to somebody and own what the Lord has done for you. Joseph of Arimathæa, where are you? Come forward, man! Come forth; your time has come! Come forth *now!* If you have followed Christ secretly, throw secrecy to the winds! Henceforth be bravest of the brave, among the body-guard of Christ, who follow him whithersoever he goeth. Have no fear nor thought of fear, but count it all joy if you fall into manifold trials for his name's sake, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xix. 23—42.

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RECEIVING THE HOLY GHOST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 13TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?"—Acts xix. 2.

IT may be well to notice what question the apostle did *not* put to these Ephesian disciples of John. He did not say to them, "Have ye believed?" This would have been a very important question, but it ought to be settled once for all. Our faith must either be boldly affirmed or sorrowfully denied, but it should not remain the subject of question. It is a great pity that so many Christians are always saying, "Have I believed?" and allowing that most vital point to be a matter of debate; for as long as the existence of faith within our souls is the subject of question, we must be unhappy. Faith is the corner-stone of the edifice of godliness, and if it be not well laid, and known to be well laid, there can be no sense of security to the inhabitant of the house. We not only ought to know that we believe, but to know whom we believe, and it would be well for us to advance beyond common believing to assurance, and thence to full assurance,—the assurance of faith, the assurance of hope, and the assurance of understanding.

Again, Paul does not put the question, "If ye have believed, how came it about? By what agencies was faith created in your souls? When did you first become believers?" These are very proper questions if we view them as points of interest, but they do not touch the essence of salvation. A man may be saved, and yet know none of the details of his conversion. No doubt, there are many strong believers who could not point to any special agency as the means by which faith was begotten within them. In general, it was by the hearing of the word of God, and by the operation of the Holy Spirit; but they do not recollect, as some do, a remarkable text, or a thrilling sermon, or a striking providence, through which they were turned from darkness to light. Thousands in the fold of Jesus came back to the good Shepherd by degrees. Many who now walk in the light received daylight, not by the leaping of the sun above the horizon in a moment, but as our days mostly begin in this country: a little light tinged the eastern sky, and then came a rosy hue, followed by a dim dawn, and afterwards came

the actual rising of the sun, which cometh out of the chambers of the east, and runs his course till he has created perfect day. Many are gradually brought to Christ, and yet they are truly brought to Christ. I say we may ask about the when and the how of conversion if we wish to be interested, as we have a right to be, in the stories of the godly; but we must not ask such questions as if they were of vital importance, and should stand first.

Paul does not enquire about ways, and means, and times, but he does ask —"Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Our Revised Version reads it, "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" and others who are probably quite as accurate read it, "Are ye receiving the Holy Ghost now that ye have believed?" It does not matter one atom which way you read it: all the renderings come to this:—Do you see a connection between your believing and the Holy Ghost? Did you receive him when you believed? Have you received him since you believed? Are you daily receiving him as you believe? That is the subject which is now before us—the Holy Spirit in our hearts as believers. Has your faith been sealed by the impress of the Holy Ghost? This is a point of the utmost importance, and upon it I desire to speak with deep and solemn earnestness in the power of the Holy Spirit himself.

You know, dear friends, when the Holy Spirit was given in the earliest ages he showed his presence by certain miraculous signs. Some of those who received the Holy Spirit spake with tongues; others began to prophesy; and a third class received the gifts of healing, so that wherever they laid their hands disease fled before them. I am sure that if these powers were given now in connection with the reception of the Holy Spirit and your believing, you would all be anxious to possess them. I can hardly imagine a single Christian who would not put to himself the enquiry, "Have I received the Holy Spirit in that fashion?" You would want to be healing, or to be speaking with tongues, or to be working miracles by which you could benefit your fellow-men and glorify God: would you not? Now, be it never forgotten that those works of the Holy Spirit which are permanent must assuredly be of greater value than those which were transitory. We cannot suppose that the Holy Ghost brought forth the best wine at first, and that his operations gradually deteriorated. It is a rule of the kingdom to keep the best wine to the last, and therefore I conclude that you and I are not left to partake of the dregs, but that those works of the Holy Spirit which are at this time vouchsafed to the Church of God are every way as valuable as those earlier miraculous gifts which have departed from us. The work of the Holy Spirit, by which men are quickened from their death in sin, is not inferior to the power which made men speak with tongues. The work of the Holy Spirit, when he comforts men and makes them glad in Christ, is by no means second to the opening of the eyes of the blind. Why, sirs, men might have the gifts of the Spirit as to miracle, and yet might perish after all; but he that hath the spiritual gifts of the Holy Ghost shall never perish: they are saving blessings, and where they come they lift the man out of his sinful estate, and make him to be a child of God. I would therefore press it upon you this morning that, as you would certainly enquire whether you had the gifts

of healing and miracle-working, if such gifts were now given to believers, much more should you enquire whether you have those more permanent gifts of the Spirit which are this day open to you all, by the which you shall work no physical miracle, but shall achieve spiritual wonders of the grander sort. If we come to weigh spiritual operations, they are by no means secondary in the judgment of enlightened servants of God. Have ye then received the Spirit since you believed? Beloved, are you now receiving the Spirit? Are you living under his divine influence? Are you filled with his power? Put the question personally. I am afraid some professors will have to admit that they hardly know whether there be any Holy Ghost; and others will have to confess that though they have enjoyed a little of his saving work, yet they do not know much of his ennobling and sanctifying influence. We have none of us participated in his operations as we might have done: we have sipped where we might have drunk; we have drunk where we might have bathed; we have bathed up to the ankles where we might have found rivers to swim in. Alas, of many Christians it must be affirmed that they have been naked, and poor, and miserable, when they might in the power of the Holy Spirit have been clad in golden garments, and have been rich and increased in goods. He waiteth to be gracious, but we linger in indifference, like those of whom we read, "they could not enter in because of unbelief." There are many such cases, and therefore it is not improper that I should with all vehemence press home upon you the question of the apostle, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Did ye receive him when ye believed? Are ye receiving him now that ye are believing in Christ Jesus?

We will, first, this morning, consider *the question;* and then we will listen to *the lessons* which it is calculated to teach.

I. I want you to consider THE QUESTION. In some respects it is *a vital question.* I shall not be playing about the outskirts of religion now, but plunging into its very centre. This question has nothing to do with the sect to which you belong, nor with the particular condition in which your mind may happen to be for the present hour; it is an enquiry which touches the heart of the man and the inmost life of his spirit. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" For, remember, the Holy Ghost is the author of all spiritual *life.* Life does not lie latent in natural men for themselves to stir it up, but until the Holy Ghost visits them, they are dead in trespasses and sins. If, when you believed, you had not a life imparted by the Holy Spirit, your believing was a dead believing, the mere counterfeit of living faith, and not the faith of God's elect. If the Holy Ghost has not been with you since your conversion, every act of your religion has been formal, dead, and unaccepted. In vain have you tuned your formal songs; in vain have you attempted to adore; your Hosannahs have languished on your tongues, and your devotion has fallen like a corpse before the altar. If the Holy Ghost is not there, life is not there: your many prayers have been mockeries; your joys have been delusions, your griefs have been carnal. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and nothing better; let that flesh be washed and cleansed, yet all that comes of it is flesh; only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. There must, then, be a

work from heaven, a work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart, or else you have not believed unto life, and you still abide in death.

As the Holy Ghost is the Author of our quickening, the Lord and Giver of life, so is he the Author of all true *instruction*. My brother, you have professed to be a believer, but you know nothing at all unless the Holy Spirit has taught you. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." To be taught of the minister is nothing, but to be taught of the Lord is everything. It is only the Spirit of God who can engrave the truth upon the fleshy tablets of the heart. We speak to the ear, but only he can speak to the inmost soul. He that professes to be a believer, while he has never received the truth in the power of it, as sent home by the Spirit of light and fire, has need to begin again, and learn the first rudiments of the faith. He has learned nothing aright who has not been under the direct tuition of the Holy Ghost. The knowledge of the letter only puffs up those who rest in it, and eventually the letter killeth; but the inward whisper, the secret admonition, the silent operation of the Spirit of God which falls as the dew from heaven upon the heart—this is quite another thing. He that hath it not is blind and ignorant, though he be a D.D., revered as a rabbi in Israel. Though he be a preacher to thousands, he is still in the dark unless the Spirit of God has shone in upon his soul. See, then, how vital this question is. Both for life and for light we must have the Holy Ghost, or else we are dead and in the dark.

Furthermore, if we have believed in Christ aright, the Holy Ghost has come upon us to *transform* us altogether. By divine grace we are not now what we used to be: we have new thoughts, new wishes, new aspirations, new sorrows, new joys, and these are wrought in us of the Spirit. A man's conversion is nothing, his believing is nothing, his profession is nothing unless he is made to be a new creature in Christ Jesus. But how can we be made new by any other power than the Holy Spirit? Only he that creates can new-create. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." We cannot hate evil and love right of ourselves, for the whole bent and bias of our spirit since the fall are toward evil, only evil, and that continually. Neither can we renew ourselves. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. Can an unclean thing bring forth itself clean out of uncleanness? Between the ribs of death there cannot be formed spontaneously the seeds of life. The Holy Spirit must transform us by the renewing of our minds: we must be begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, or else we are still in the flesh, and cannot please God. If our faith has not brought with it the Holy Spirit, if, indeed, it is not the fruit of the Spirit, and we are not changed in nature and in life, then our faith is presumption, and our profession is a lie.

Furthermore, it is absolutely essential to all true religion that you and I should be *sanctified*. A faith which works not for purification will work for putrefaction. Unless our faith makes us pine after holiness, and pant after conformity to God, it is no better than the faith of devils, and perhaps it is not even so good as that. How can any man become holy except by the Spirit of holiness? A holy man is the workmanship of the Holy Spirit. Through faith we are sanctified by the operation of the Holy Ghost, so that we are delivered from the dominion of

sin, and set free to follow after that which is good and pure and right in the sight of God. Faith which does not bring holiness with it is a dead faith which will never bring us into communion with the living God. Oh, the absolute necessity that the Holy Ghost should rest upon us when we believe in Christ!

Beside that, remember, dear friends, there is one mark of God's people which if it be lacking is fatal, and that is *prayer*. "Behold, he prayeth," is a true sign of the new birth; but can a man pray without the assistance of the Holy Spirit? Let him try to do so, and if he be honest and sincere he will soon find the value of that text: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Pray without the Spirit of God? Oh, sir, it will be a mechanical performance, the statue of prayer, but not the living, prevailing supplication of an heir of heaven. You may go to your chamber, and kneel down at that particular chair, where you have so often enjoyed communion with God, but unless you invoke the Spirit of God the posture shall be a weariness, the exercise shall be heartless, and the result shall be worthless. What is the incense without the burning coals? What is the mercy-seat without the Shekinah light? Prayer without the Spirit is as a bird without wings, or an arrow without a bow. As well hope to see a dead man sit up in his coffin, and plead a case in a court of law, as hope to see a man prevail in prayer who is a stranger to the Holy Ghost, who is the Spirit of grace and of supplications. You will leave your prayer-closet unrefreshed if you have been in it without the Spirit. Even the desire to pray is not with us unless the Holy Ghost has wrought it in the soul; no true word of supplication can arise from the heart unless the Spirit of God shall prompt it. Dear, dear friends, you do see, do you not, how on all these points contact with the Spirit of God becomes essential to our present spiritual life and to our eternal salvation? Look ye to it; look ye to it at once. If all you have is what you have made yourself, you and your works must perish; if all your prayers have risen from no greater depth than your own heart, and if they are the fruit of no better spirit than your own, they will never reach to the ear of God, nor bring you blessings from the throne. If there is not something supernatural about your religion, it will be a millstone about your neck to sink you into hell. What comes from the dunghill, and is of the dunghill, will rot on the dunghill. That which cometh from a man's heart, apart from the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, will rise no higher than his own depraved nature, and leave him unblessed; but that which cometh from above will elevate him to its own element, and cause him to dwell with Christ at the right hand of God.

But now, while this is a vital question, I beg to say further that *where it is not vital it is nevertheless greatly important.* I do not think we ought always to be asking the question, "Is this essential?" meaning thereby, "Is it essential to our salvation?" Those are miserable souls who would be penurious in obedience and love, so that they would labour and love no more than is absolutely needful to get to heaven. They would be saved in the cheapest possible way, and they would be content to crawl over the threshold of glory, but not to go too far in. They

want as much grace as may be necessary to float them over the bar at the harbour's mouth; but they do not desire an abundant entrance. O ye miserly professors, stinting yourselves in the matter of the grace of God, I have little enough to say to you; but I turn to the children of God, and joyfully remind them that there is in the Holy Ghost not only what they absolutely need to save them, but much more. Here is not only bread, but wine on the lees well refined. In the Holy Ghost there is comfort to gladden you, grace to strengthen you, holiness to ennoble you, and love to purify you.

For, first, the Spirit of God is the *Comforter*, and how important it is that you should be comforted! Why do you hang your heads? Why go ye mourning as if ye were in the night, and the dews were thick upon your eyelids? You are the children of the morning, and the children of the day: wherefore rejoice in the Lord, and walk in the light as he is in the light. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" You whose brows are furrowed with care, whose hearts are distracted with anxiety, receive the Spirit of consolation and be glad in the Lord, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

In the Holy Ghost there is also a spirit of *enlightening*. Do you not read the word of God understanding very little of it? Do you not hear it as though you heard not? Why is this? Should you not seek more of the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that he may lead you into all truth? How much happier you would be, and how much more useful, if you knew more of the things of God! The Holy Spirit can take of the things of Christ, and can show them unto you. Now you only see men as trees walking, but there is no need to be content with such dim vision, for the Comforter can anoint your eyes with eye-salve that you may see; he can open your eyes that you may behold wondrous things out of his law. Why not seek to have the enlightening Spirit of God resting on you, to teach you in his word and way?

The Spirit of God is, also, the spirit of *liberty*, but some of God's children do not seem to have attained their freedom as yet. They have one fetter remaining on their foot, and though they try to enter into the broad fields of heavenly enjoyment, they cannot escape from their prison. Of such we may well ask—Have ye received the Spirit since ye believed? If so, wherefore are ye the slaves of custom, the bondaged serfs of fashion? Wherefore do you ask leave of your fellow-men to breathe, or think? Why are ye so cowardly that ye dare not follow conscience, or speak of the things of God? The fear of man bringeth a snare to many, and that snare is also a chain to their feet. It ought not so to be. Rather should they feel that, since the Son has made them free, they are free indeed. The Holy Spirit is a free Spirit, and makes men free; where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Glory be to thee, O God, "I am thy servant; thou hast loosed my bonds." Many weak children of God have received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but they have not yet received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, "Abba, Father." Oh, the glory of the Spirit of God when he makes us feel that we are no more servants, but sons; not under the law, but under grace; not under wrath, but under love; not doomed to death, but endowed with life! He hath brought us forth from the prison-house, and broken all our bonds asunder. He hath set our feet

in a large room, and made us to walk at liberty, because we keep his statutes. Ours is the freedom of no mean city, for our citizenship is in heaven, and the Spirit of God enables us to enjoy the burgess-ship of the New Jerusalem. It is important that we should know what this heavenly freedom means.

Some of God's people need to feel the Spirit of God as a power *moving and impelling them to holy service.* Do you never hear behind you a voice saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it"? Have you never known holy impulses bidding you do this and that—impulses which did not come from human nature, for they impelled you to something which you would naturally have avoided? And do you never follow after things unseen, driven onward as by a powerful wind, not to be resisted? Have you not been made willing, in the day of God's power, to do the divine bidding? I would we had more of it, for then we should be more ready for service, and should do greater things than these.

That same Spirit who moves the saints to work, also *empowers* them to achieve the purpose which is put into their souls. By his aid you shall go forth in your feebleness, and put to flight the armies of the aliens; you shall be in God's hands as a sharp threshing instrument having teeth, and shall thresh mountains, and beat them small; yea, fan them, and the wind shall carry them away. Does any man know what the Spirit of God can make of him? I believe the greatest, ablest, most faithful, most holy man of God might have been greater, and abler, and more faithful, and more holy, if he had put himself more completely at the Spirit's disposal. Wherever God has done great things by a man he has had power to do more had the man been fit for it. We are straitened in ourselves, not in God. O brothers, the church is weak to-day because the Holy Spirit is not upon her members as we could desire him to be. You and I are tottering along like feeble babes, whereas, had we more of the Spirit, we might walk without fainting, run without weariness, and even mount up with wings as eagles. Oh, for more of the anointing of the Holy Ghost whom Christ is prepared to give immeasurably unto us if we will but receive him! "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Is there not much divine power which has not as yet been manifested in you?

"Oh," saith one, "I feel so dull to-day!" Do you? Is not the Holy Spirit the power to refresh you, and to rekindle in your soul the dying flame of spiritual fervour? Oh, if you did but receive his power to-day, you would not mind the heaviness of the atmosphere, nor any other deadening surroundings, for the Spirit would triumph over the flesh. Do you know the power of the Spirit? Did he never make you like the chariots of Amminadib? Did he never carry you away with his supreme power? Did you never run like Elijah before Ahab's chariot, and feel that it was a little thing to do? Can you not say, "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength! By my God have I leaped over a wall, and broken through a troop: I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me"? These are the expressions of souls familiar with the Holy Ghost: when he inspires them, they are divinely strong, even to omnipotence. Brethren, we must have the Holy Spirit. Are you receiving of his forces? Are you receiving his fulness even now?

Now I come to notice that *this question is assuredly answerable.* "Have you received the Holy Ghost?" The notion has sprung up that you cannot tell whether you have the Holy Spirit or not: but you can. Give a man an electric shock, and I warrant you he will know it; but if he has the Holy Ghost he will know it much more. You may sometimes raise the question, "Did I ever feel the Holy Ghost in years gone by?" but you cannot ask the question, "Do I feel it now?" for if you feel it now you have the witness in yourself that the Lord is at work with you. You need not ask a question about present experience. If you do not feel the Holy Ghost at work distinctly and perceptibly even now, then lift your heart to God for it, and pray that you may now receive him in all his fulness.

"Oh," says one, "I thought we must always say, 'I hope so, I trust so.'" I know that jargon: but men do not say "I hope I have an estate," or "I trust I have twenty shillings in the pound," or "I think I have a wife and children." Some of us are quite clear about these matters, one way or the other. We could not live on guess-work as to daily life, much less as to eternal things. O souls, live daily on what God gives you, and you cannot doubt; live near to Christ, and you cannot doubt whether you love him; live in the Holy Spirit, give yourselves up fully to his divine anointings and bedewings, and you will not have to say, "I hardly know whether there be any Holy Ghost," for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

Permit me to say here that there are many professors to whom *this question is inevitable.* I will pick out certain of them. There is the brother with the long dreary face, the Knight of the Rueful Countenance. You know him, and you pity him. His favourite hymn is—

> "'Tis a point I long to know,
> Oft it causes anxious thought."

Is there anything dreary? He delights in it as much as he can delight in anything. He is sure of nothing but the horrible: everything that is pleasant he is afraid of. His life is one protracted groan. Come along, brother, and shake hands as cheerfully as you can. Please tell me, have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed? How he hesitates! Poor soul, he is perplexed. He is not well acquainted with the Comforter. Here is a hymn for him; let us sing it to a gladsome tune—

> "Why should the children of a King
> Go mourning all their days?
> Great Comforter, descend and bring
> Some tokens of thy grace.
>
> Dost thou not dwell in all the saints
> And seal the heirs of heaven?
> When wilt thou banish my complaints,
> And show my sins forgiven?"

Surely, if we have the earnest of the Spirit, the first-fruits of heaven, we ought to rejoice in the Lord always. Brother, you look comfortless; how is this when the Comforter is come to you?

Another brother is a member of the church, and a very unpleasant neighbour, for he picks holes in everybody and everything; he is a born grumbler, and since he has been new born he has not given up the habit.

When he goes home this morning, after dinner he will spend the afternoon in his growlery, complaining of the heat, and perhaps of my sermon. Oh, my dear brother, you who are so uneasy and unhappy, and so worrying and annoying to everybody, did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed? Are you receiving the Holy Ghost still? I have sometimes thought that certain unfriendly friends must have been baptized in vinegar instead of water, from the sharp acid of their temperament. Surely the Spirit of God is a dove, full of peace, and love, and kindness, and not a bird of prey. Let me put my hand on that brother's shoulder, if he will allow such a rudeness, and say, "Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?"

Here comes another who flies out into great tempers, and grows fiercely angry. A little thing puts him out: he finds fault readily enough, and becomes excited in no time. He says that he is very sorry for it afterwards, but this does not remove the wounds which he has inflicted. If you cut a person's head off, it is of small use to apologise to him afterwards. Many a man boils over with passion and scalds his friend, and then in cooler moments expresses his regret. All very fine; but fine words cure no blisters. I would suggest to you the next time you are in a great temper that you ask yourself this question, "Have I received the Holy Ghost since I believed? Is he not the spirit of peace and gentleness?" I fancy anybody putting that question to you when you are in an irritated state of mind: you would reply, "Pray do not mention such a subject here, for I am not acting as I ought to do." Then do act as you ought to do, and ask for the Spirit of God to help you to be quiet, forgiving, humble, and meek.

Here is a brother who cannot be happy unless he indulges in worldly frivolities and useless amusements. When he gets into a grand frolic with worldly people, he finds himself at home; but the joys of godliness he despises. My friend, the next time you are coming home from a gay party, I should like to meet you in the street and enquire, "Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?" You would think me almost blaspheming. Alas! the blasphemy is in your heart. You would feel awkward, would you not? Do not do things which make you feel awkward; keep out of those scenes which are unfit for a child of God. Do not play with the devil's children. Many people around this place are sore put to it to keep their children from bad company. There is no playground for their children but the streets, and it seems hard when they say that their children shall not associate with rude children in the road; yet they must do it. Our Lord does not love that his dear children should sport with heirs of wrath, or make them their intimates. Such evil communications will bring you misery sooner or later. You cannot expect the Holy Spirit to continue with you if you are joined with the adversaries of the Lord.

But there are certain persons who live solely to hoard and scrape and get money, that they may grow rich and grind everybody else to pieces in the process. I would like when the avaricious man is totalling up his gains to put to him the question, "Have you received the Holy Ghost since you believed?" He would answer, "Don't, don't; it is terribly out of place to mention so serious a matter." It is out of place no doubt, for the man himself is out of place; but ought a believer to be in a

position in which it shall be out of place for a friend to speak to him about his eternal interests?

I know *some to whom the question is needless.* You never did put it to them, and you never will. You meet them in the morning, soaring aloft, like the lark, in the praises of God. See them in trouble: they are patient and resigned to their heavenly Father's will. Mark how they spend their lives in hallowed service, seeking ever to win sinners to Christ: their common talk is sweet with the honey of the Holy Land: you cannot be with them ten minutes without discovering that they have leaned on Jesus' bosom. There is an aroma about them which tells you that they dwell in the garden of the Lord. When they tell you their experience it is e'en as if an angel shook his wings. You do not ask them if they have received the Holy Ghost; but you stand still and admire the work of the Spirit of God in them. Now, beloved, be such yourselves. If our church is to be strong, and if it is to make a lasting impress upon its age by bearing a telling testimony to the truth, we must not only have the Spirit of God in his essential operations, but in his soul-enriching, heart-delighting, life-sanctifying power. Thus will he turn earth into heaven, and make us poor earth-born creatures meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

So much upon the question. I cannot send it home; I can only pray that God the Holy Spirit, whom I desire to honour, may apply these thoughts with power to your souls.

II. One or two LESSONS can be gathered upon the very surface of this question. "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Then the first lesson is, *we are not to look for salvation to one single act of faith in the past*, but to Jesus, in whom we continue to believe. I have read, very much to my grief, an assertion that, whatever we may be to-day, we are safe, if years ago we exercised a single act of faith. There may be truth in the statement, but it is so badly stated, and so wretchedly distorted, that it looks like a lie: that which saves is a faith which does not spend itself in a single act, but continues to work and operate throughout the whole of life. It is not a question for me to-day, "Did I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in the year 1850, on a certain morning in the month of January?" Oh, no: the question is, "Do I believe in the Lord Jesus at this hour?" For if my faith is "faith of the operation of God," it has continued to this hour, and will continue to the end. All my troubles, all my temptations, all my sins have not killed my faith; but for every day, as the day has come, I have continued to receive the Holy Spirit's gracious aid since I believed, and was brought into newness of life. "The just shall live by faith." It is a principle within, springing up unto everlasting life; it is a living well which never ceases to flow. It is not something I do in one five minutes, and then have done with it; it is a holy act which I began to do at a certain time, but which I shall never leave off doing till there remains nothing more to be believed. They say we do not believe in heaven, but this is surely an error occasioned by want of thought. Heaven is a fit sphere for faith, not faith for what we shall there see, but for things promised and not yet fulfilled. If I were to go to heaven to-day, I should believe in my stopping there; I should believe in the Lord's continuing to love me, I should believe

in all the prophecies yet unfulfilled, in the ingathering of the redeemed, and the perfecting of the church, and the second Advent of the Lord. I should look for the resurrection, the new heavens and the new earth, the millennial glory, the binding of Satan, and the eternal glory of the Triune God. Faith may be altogether lost in sight so far as things realized are concerned, but it will be grandly exercised upon blessings yet to come. We must live by faith; it is not only our starting-point, but the road along which we are to travel.

The next lesson of the text is that *we must continue to live by receiving.* We received Christ Jesus the Lord at the first, and now we receive the Holy Ghost. These disciples were questioned about their receiving rather than their expending, for at bottom everything depends upon what we receive. Nothing can come out of us if it does not first go into us. We are always charity children. It is our blessed lot to live upon the alms of divine bounty. The question may still be asked of us, "What hast thou which thou hast not received?" We are always filled out of the fulness of the Lord; for we are not fountains but reservoirs, not creators but receivers. What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards us? We can only keep on receiving, —take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.

Again, let us learn that *we may not despise the very lowest form of spiritual life;* nay, not even those who have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. Paul, when he met these half-instructed disciples, did not say, "You see the door. Be off; you have nothing to do with me, for you are so desperately ignorant." On the contrary, he sat down and taught them more, and then baptized them. God has some children who are mere babes and sucklings, and it is a fact for their comfort that he does not judge of their being his children by measuring their height. Babes in grace are as much his children as those who have reached perfect manhood. Weaklings are dear to God; let them be dear to us. When you are considering some poor child of God who has no education, and cannot read the Bible, do not judge him by his knowledge. The question is not whether he knows "A" from "B," for if he knows "J" from "I" he knows enough; that is to say, if he knows Jesus from himself he has grasped the essential point. If he trusts Christ and not himself he knows enough to take him to heaven, and enough for you to take him into your heart.

Another lesson is that *the Holy Spirit always keeps sweet company with Jesus Christ.* As long as these good people only knew John the Baptist, they might know water baptism, but they could not know the baptism of the Holy Ghost. It was only when they came to know Jesus that then the Spirit of God came upon them, and they began to work those mighty things which are the fruits of the Spirit. Learn, then, to keep close to Christ both in your lives and in your teachings. The Spirit of God will not set his seal to what I say or what you say, but he will confirm the testimony of Jesus. The things of God concerning Christ Jesus our Lord shall never be without the attesting power of the Holy Ghost.

Once more, *the Holy Ghost can be yet more fully possessed by all believers.* If there should be a brother or sister here who has a notion that he cannot have any more grace, I am afraid he is

specially in need of it. The perfect brother I must leave to the angels; he is above my reach, for I am sent to fallible men. I conceive that when a man is so good in his own esteem that he cannot be better, he is even then no better than he should be, and is either cracked in his head or his honesty. However, I leave him to his own Master; but as for you and for me, let us be certain that if we have been taught of the Spirit, there is more light yet for the Spirit to give to us: if we have been quickened of the Spirit, there is more life yet for the Spirit to impart to us; if we have been comforted, there are greater consolations yet which the Spirit of God can apply to our hearts; if we have been made strong, we can be stronger yet to do yet greater exploits; if we have had communion with Christ, we can have closer communion yet, and enter more thoroughly into the secret place of the tabernacle of the Most High. If it can be, then why should it not be? Does not every man or woman here that is a Christian say, "I mean to realize all the possibilities of true religion"? A little religion is a miserable thing. He that has just enough to save him at last, may not have enough to comfort him for the present. He that has much grace, and is filled with the Spirit of God, shall have two heavens, a heaven here and a heaven hereafter. I desire to make that true in my own case. I would find two heavens in Jesus; are there not many more? He who has the Spirit richly shall have the joy of the Lord here to be his strength, and the joy of the Lord hereafter to be his reward. Come, let us ask for all that God is willing to give. Does he not say, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it"? Come, ye little ones; why remain little? Our prayer for you is, that you may be as David, and David as the angel of the Lord. Come. You are living on crumbs, why not eat abundantly of the bread of heaven? Do not be content with pence, for a king's ransom is at your disposal. Poor brother, rise out of your poverty. Sister, bowed down by reason of the little of the Spirit of God you have received, believe for more, and pray upon a larger scale. May the Lord enlarge all our hearts, and fill them; and then enlarge them again, and fill them again; so that from day to day we may receive the Holy Ghost, till at the last Jesus shall receive us into his glory.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts xviii. 24—28; xix. 1—20.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—57, 448, 464.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HELPS TO FULL ASSURANCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 20TH, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."—1 John v. 13.

How very simple this all is! John had an eagle's wing with which to soar aloft, and an eagle's eye with which to penetrate into great mysteries; and yet of all the writers of the Old or New Testament he is one of the simplest. He never endeavours to show you the greatness of his mind or the grandeur of his rhetoric; on the contrary, he speaks as a child to those who are children in the school of love. I would that all of us who try to teach others would remember this, and sink ourselves in our lesson.

It is equally notable how practical John is. When he writes he always has a worthy intent in every line; "These are written," saith he, and he explains the design with which he penned the record. These epistles are not written to dazzle you, nor to lead you into speculation, nor to gratify your curiosity; but these are written "that ye may know that ye have eternal life." The practical object may seem to the high-soaring votaries of modern thought to be commonplace; but John had a deep veneration for matters which moderns despise. The commonplaces of theology are the greenest of the pastures wherein the sheep of God feed and lie down. It is infinitely more to our benefit to know that we have eternal life than to be able to predict the future of empires or to forecast the destiny of kings. It is of more practical importance for us to know that we have eternal life than to be able to explain all mysteries, or to speak with tongues. John acts according to his loving heart when he writes to lead his brethren into the assured knowledge of their personal possession of eternal life.

When he tells us his design, it is that he may help to accomplish his purpose; for by informing men of understanding what he is writing for, he stirs them up to see his purpose and to fall in with it. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." Dear friends, if this be the design of the inspired

apostle, let us not be slow to co-operate with him; but let us pray this morning for the full assurance of faith, that we may know of a surety that eternal life is pulsing in our hearts. May you who have not believed in Jesus feel a fervent desire within your spirits to take that preliminary step, and become believers in the Son of God.

Come, then, to the text, and with us consider, first, *to whom it was written,*—"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God;" secondly, *to what end it is written,*—"That ye may know that ye have eternal life." This will lead us, thirdly, to consider *how that which was written in this epistle conduces to this blessed confidence:* and then, lastly, I shall have to call your attention to *an added matter which is never forgotten* by John, even when he writes with the design of promoting the highest form of Christian attainment,—"That ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." They did already believe on the sacred name; yet it remained a part of his design to confirm them in that faith, and conduct them to higher degrees of it.

May the Holy Spirit make our meditation profitable.

I. First, then, briefly, TO WHOM WAS THIS WRITTEN? It is important to observe the direction of a letter; for I may be reading a communication meant for somebody else, and if it should contain good tidings, I may be deceiving myself by appropriating the news.

This epistle, and this particular text in it, were written *for all those who believe on the name of the Son of God.* In part of the epistle he says, "I write unto you, little children"; then he says, "I write unto you, young men"; further on he says, "I have written unto you, fathers"; but now he writes to babes, to young men, and to fathers under the one comprehensive description of those who have believed on the name of the Son of God. Our discourse is, therefore, for all of you who are believers in Christ. Little child, you who have just begun the spiritual life, we would have you attain to the confidence that you have eternal life. Young man, sternly battling with sin, we would have you strengthened for your conflict by knowing that you have eternal life. And you fathers, let us hope you have not come so far without this knowledge; but whether you have or not, these things are written that you in your mature years may rise to the full conviction that the life of God is strong within you. No person, young or old, is excluded from this text, unless he is an unbeliever.

To unbelievers this text is not written: it is for all who trust in Jesus; but it is for none beside. If you enquire why it is not addressed to unbelievers, I answer, simply because it would be preposterous to wish men to be assured of that which is not true. John never wished that a man who had not believed in Jesus Christ should even think that he had eternal life; for it would be a fatal error. "He that believeth not shall not see life;" how, then, could he have an assurance of possessing it? Faith is a necessary preliminary to assurance; you must have the blade of faith before you can have the ripe corn of assurance. Dear friends, do not dream of being sure that you are saved apart from making sure that you have trusted yourselves with the crucified Saviour. The atonement presented by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gives assurance of salvation to all who trust in it, but to none besides. It would be taking things out of their due order, it would be doing you real and perhaps

fatal mischief if we should lead you to presume that you have eternal life before you have unreservedly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." I speak, therefore, to all of you who have come to Christ, however imperfect and undeveloped your spiritual life may as yet be; but I invite none beside to the banquet of joyous confidence. As with a drawn sword of fire, John's words guard the way like the cherub at the gate of Paradise: his words, "these things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God," keep back every man who has not believed in Jesus from dreaming that he has eternal life. What hast thou to do with the rest, and the peace, and the blessedness of full assurance, unless thou hast received the appointed Saviour into thy heart's trust?

We may gather from this address being made to all the people of God and to none beside, that *there are some believers in the world, and true believers too, who do not know that they have eternal life.* A very large number of true believers do not know this cheering fact. For instance, certain Christians believe that even if they are now saved they may yet be lost: that even if they have the life of God in them, that life may die out. Beloved, I pray for you that you may know that you have *eternal* life, and not a temporary life. The life which the Holy Spirit imparts to the believer is not a thing of days, and weeks, and months, and years: its dwelling-place is in the region of eternity. It is practically a divine life which God puts into us, whereby we are made "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." We were begotten again unto a lively or living hope in the day of our regeneration. The new birth from above by the Spirit of God is a birth to an endless life. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Our Lord at the well of Samaria gives us another figure: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Many imagine that this spring can fail. How much comfort God's dear children lose by not apprehending the absolute immortality of the new life I will not venture to say; but this much I will declare—that to me it is the very crown and glory of the gospel, that if I receive Jesus into my soul, and the Holy Spirit imparts to me the new life, I have received an everlasting blessing. Has not Jesus said "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand"?

Again, a large number of Christ's people who may be perfectly sound in the doctrinal view of the nature of this life do not know that they possess it at this present moment if they are believers. I find even the commentators, when they try to write upon this text, and most of the preachers who have left us printed sermons upon it, read the text as if it said, "that ye may know that ye *shall have* eternal life." They speak about the full assurance that we shall one day enter into glory. I beg their pardon, the text does not say anything of the kind: it is, "that ye may know that ye *have* eternal life," even here, at this present hour. The spiritual life which is in the believer at this moment is the same life

which shall be in him in heaven. The grace-life is the glory-life in the bud: the same life, only less developed. We shall not in the article of death receive another life than that which we have while we are sojourning here below. Death sets a seal on that which is, but it produces nothing. There is to be a very palpable change wrought upon the body; but as to the spirit, the life of God which is in it now is the life which will dwell in it throughout eternity. Our believing life is eternal life. We want children of God who believe in Jesus to feel that the holy flame which kindles their lamp to-day is the same fire which will shine forth before the throne of God for ever: they have begun already to exercise those holy emotions of delight and joy which will be their heaven: they already possess in measure those perceptions and faculties which will be theirs in glory. Let us recollect this, and know that, as believers, we have eternal life.

Yet again, there are some Christians who believe all this, and are perfectly right in theory, but yet they each one cry, "I want to know that I have eternal life. I want a fuller assurance of salvation than I have already obtained." That is also our desire for you; for if you know you have believed in Jesus you certainly are quickened with eternal life, and ought to know it.

But it is only to you that have believed that the text speaks. If you have not believed in the glorious name of the Well-beloved, then come at once and put your trust in him. This is the gospel to every unbeliever: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." For "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." An unbeliever may have an assurance that he will be lost, but he cannot have an assurance that he is saved, or ever will be. First, believe on the name of the Son of God, who is manifested to take away sin. Trust in his glorious Person, in his finished work, in his accepted sacrifice, in his prevailing intercession, and in his glorious advent which is yet to be. Look unto him, and be ye saved. Rest alone upon the one foundation which God has laid in Zion, and then to you will the word of this consolation be sent, but not till then.

II. So, secondly, I have now to mention TO WHAT END JOHN HAS WRITTEN.

When he says, "that ye may know that ye have eternal life," I think his first meaning is *that you may know that everybody who believes in Jesus Christ has eternal life.* This is not a fact about you and a few others only, but it is a general truth—every man that believes on the name of the Son of God has eternal life. We may not doubt this; it is not a matter of inference and deduction, but a matter of revelation from God. You are not to form an opinion upon it, but to believe it, for the Lord hath said it. Listen to these words. 1 John v. 1: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Thus saith the Spirit of God, and so it must be. We do not need any further evidence: if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. The Spirit of God bears witness to this, and as the Spirit is truth, his witness is certainly true: accept you his witness and ask for no other. It is written (1 John v. 12), "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." This is the unvarying testimony of the whole of Scripture, and specially of the writings of the

apostle John. How many times over he insists upon it that the believer has eternal life! I beseech you, never question the statement. Settle it in your mind; for if you have any doubt about it you have undermined the gospel, and rejected the witness of the Lord, and denied the Holy Ghost. You will not behave thus wickedly; therefore glorify God by believing his testimony.

I think that John in this passage meant, and we will consider him as meaning, something more—namely, *he would have us know that we personally have eternal life by having us know that we do personally believe in Jesus.* It is one thing to know that every believer has eternal life; but it is quite another thing to know that I am a believer so as to have eternal life myself. I have read of one who fell into the water, and as he was sinking he saw a rainbow in the sky above him. "Ah," thought he, "God has made a covenant not to destroy the earth with a flood, and yet it is no comfort to me, for I fear I shall be drowned." The largest provisions of grace avail us nothing unless we have a personal interest in them. It is true that every believer has eternal life, but what if I am not a believer?

It is a very singular thing that people should not know whether they believe in Jesus or not: for it is an ascertainable piece of knowledge. I know whether I think; I know whether I resolve; I know whether I doubt; I ought, therefore, to know whether I believe. But you see human nature received a terrible twist at the Fall, and it has fallen into a very foggy region, so that the eyes of the understanding are all asquint, and the air around is very dank. Perhaps you ask me to speak for myself, and I assure you that I do so; but at the same time I do not hesitate to say the same of you. You, my clever friend, who are so wonderfully clear-headed, I should not wonder but what you are the foggiest and blindest of the whole company. The worst darkness is that which so blinds a man that he thinks he can see better than other people. We are all by nature in such a mixed up state that we need not wonder at any strange statement or feeling. When you hear brethren assert that a person who is not assured that he believes must necessarily be an unbeliever, you may say to yourself, "That friend does not know everything." There is no estimating the possible inconsistency and contradiction of the human mind. I have been in a state of mind in which I have questioned the possibility of there being a grain of grace in me, and yet I have clung to Jesus with a death grip. At such times my mind has worked morbidly, and its way has been turned upside down. Bunyan speaks of being "much tumbled up and down in his thoughts;" and that nearly hits my mental condition. It is very possible for a man to be a very strong believer and yet to question whether he has a spark of faith. I have heard ministers ridicule this state of inward questioning; and, indeed, it is ridiculous to all but those who are in it. If you once become a sufferer under this wretched complaint, the absurdity of your disease will not lessen its painfulness. Our mental distresses need not be logical; they can be full of anguish, and yet be most unreasonable. You probably know some people who are excessively nervous: they are afraid the skies will fall or the earth will crack: this is very stupid, but the agony caused thereby is very real. There is little of the Christian spirit in the man who can increase mental torment by

turning it into jest. This is not to pour oil into the wound, but to rub salt into it. No doubt, the doubts which many have of their personal safety are very unreasonable; but a servant of God is not therefore to scorn the subject of them, for the Lord Jesus Christ had compassion on the ignorant. He did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, nor must we. I am personally taught to be tender of poor doubters, for I have often been one myself. I would sometimes give all that I have to be able to feel myself to be even the least in the Lord's family. Just now I enjoy a full assurance, but I am not always on the mount; and therefore I have bowels for others because I am myself compassed with infirmity. We may not judge harshly, as if things were as we would theoretically arrange them, but we must deal with things as they are; and it cannot be questioned that some of the best believers are at times sorely put to it to know whether they are believers at all. The prayer of John is that such people, yea, and all believers, may know of a surety beyond all doubt that they have eternal life.

So far is human nature out of joint that it is necessary for me to say what it seems superfluous to say—that full assurance of our possessing eternal life is possible. The Church of Rome teaches that no man can be assured that he has eternal life, except some few to whom supernatural revelations may be given. That sort of doctrine lingers in the air of Protestantism; many people think the same, though they do not say so. Impossible to know that you are quickened! It ought to be impossible to have any doubt about it. Rationally, a living man should know that he is alive. No man should give sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids while he has a doubt about his eternal state.

It is possible, and if it is possible it is very desirable; for when a man knows that he has eternal life, what a comfort it is to him! What gratitude it produces in his spirit! How it helps him to live above the world! With what holy ardour does he pursue the service of God, knowing that he has an eternal reward! He has not to waste time in calculating evidences, and perpetually examining himself; for he has examined himself, and he has cast himself upon Christ, and he knows that he has eternal life. With what rapidity does he make progress, for he leaves the first principles and goes on towards perfection! No longer questioning, he shows holy daring, and goes from strength to strength in rapturous fellowship and ecstatic enjoyment: he advances from glory to glory, his faith making substantial to him, even while he is here below, the joys which are laid up for the redeemed. I say again, if full assurance be possible, it is eminently desirable.

And I go a little further: it is our duty to obtain full assurance. We should not have been commanded to give diligence to make our calling and election sure if it were not right for us to be sure. I am sure it is right for a child of God to know that God is his Father, and never to have a question in his heart as to his sonship. I know it is right for a soul that is married unto Christ to know the sweet love of the bridegroom, and never to tolerate a cloud of suspicion to come between the soul and the full enjoyment of Christ's love. Wherefore, I would urge you onward to know that you have eternal life. My brethren, John, being dead, yet speaketh out of this Book: he calls upon you to know

that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and that we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. He bids us as believers firmly repose our souls upon the promise of our faithful God.

I sorrowfully remind certain of you that, as you have not believed, you have neither part nor lot in this matter, and the beloved disciple speaks not to you.

III. Thirdly, I come to where I would lay the stress of the discourse this morning,—WHAT HAS JOHN SAID IN THIS EPISTLE WHICH CONDUCES TO OUR FULL ASSURANCE? How does he help us to know that we are believers, and consequently to know that we have eternal life? I cannot attempt a full *résumé* of this most blessed epistle; but I shall select a few items from very many. An exposition of this epistle, written to show how it enables men to know that they have eternal life, would be a very valuable thing; and I feel confident that without the slightest forcing of a single sentence it could be shown that the whole letter bears upon assurance. The wish of the apostle that all believers might know that they have eternal life is the silken thread upon which his pearls are strung. Now believers ought to know that they have eternal life, and they ought never to doubt it, for God's own word assures them that it is so. Remember that word of the Lord Jesus in John vi. 47—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Will you doubt the Lord's "Verily, verily"? Christ's word unsupported by any external evidence is quite enough to satisfy every gracious mind. "Let God be true, but every man a liar," —yea, let every circumstance be a liar. Everything that we have looked upon as evidence should be regarded as a lie if it denies the declaration of the Lord. Out of this simple faith in God comes assurance naturally, by the operation of the Spirit of God upon the heart. Take pure and unadulterated milk, and let it stand, and you will soon get cream. Faith is the milk, and full assurance is the cream upon it; and when faith has stood long enough, you may see the rich cream of holy confidence upon the top of it. The witness of God is true, and therefore to be believed, yea, to be believed with full assurance. According to all right principles, assurance should increase by the lapse of time during which faith occupies itself upon the sure promise. I have trusted my soul on Christ, therefore I have eternal life. How do I know? I know, because the Spirit of God has so declared it in the Word of God. Thus has he spoken—"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." I believe in the Son, and, therefore, I have eternal life. Do friends assure me that they see the life in me? I am very much obliged to them, but I do not need their evidence. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself." When the Holy Spirit has made a statement, it is something like impertinence either to ask or to offer any further evidence upon the point. Therefore, that matter is not my subject. I take it, we must not offer you any other argument to prove the eternal life of believers beyond this,—God has said it.

The matter which may be argued about is this—"Do I believe in Jesus? Am I a believer in such a sense that I have eternal life?" Let us look at the epistle for help in this enquiry.

You will find, first, that John mentions as an evidence *truthful dealing with God, in faith and confession of sin.* Naturally men walk in darkness or falsehood towards God; but when we have believed in Jesus we come to walk in the light of truth. Read in the first chapter of the epistle from verse 6 to 9. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The believer does not attempt to deal with God as if he had no sin; for that were to make Christ useless, seeing there would be no need of his blood to cleanse. He does not say that he now lives without sin; for that were to make his cleansing a thing of the past, whereas the Spirit teacheth that it is a present matter, concerning our present walk with God. To claim to live without sin is to walk in the dark; for the claim is a false one. The man who walks in the light comes before God as a sinner, whom the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin. So, then, you may take this as an evidence that you are a saved man, if you deal truthfully with God: if you confess your guilt before God, if your only hope of being cleansed from it lies in the blood of Jesus Christ, then you have come to act towards God on the line of truth, and he accepts you. You that are not a believer in Christ may try to forget that you have any sin, or by forms and ceremonies to offer some kind of palliation of your sin: but when you are brought into the honest light you will make a clean breast of it, and cease to act a borrowed part. Your cry will be, "Search me, O God, and try me," and your appeal will be to the boundless mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Be sure that you are a child of God when sin is confessed, and faith is looking to Jesus for the removal of it. "Father, I have sinned," is the cry of a true-born child. "God be merciful to me, a sinner," is the prayer of the man who goes down to his house justified. We can repeat with rapture the words of Paul to the Romans, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

Next, John gives us *obedience* as a test of the child of God. Look to the second chapter, and begin to read at the third verse: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Come, then, beloved brethren, do you obey the will of the Lord from your heart? Is holiness the aim and object of your life? Do you strive to do as Jesus bids you? Do you set your clock by the heavenly sun? Do you try to order your ways and your steps according to the law of the Lord? Do you delight yourself also in the law of God after the inner man? Do you press forward after perfect holiness? Then his servant you are whom you obey. Rest assured beyond all

question that you are one of Christ's sheep, for he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." "He that doeth righteousness is righteous." If grace has made you obedient it has given you eternal life.

Follow me as I call attention, next, to the evidence of *love* in the heart. In the second chapter read at the ninth verse: "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." Then go on to the fourteenth verse of the third chapter. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." This will greatly help you to decide your case. Do you hate anybody? Are you seeking revenge? Are you unforgiving? Then you are not dwelling in the light: you are of Cain and not of Christ. Do you feel that you love your enemies, and that, in fact, you are no man's enemy, because love is the principle of your life? "Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." We must feel a general benevolence towards all men, and a still more intense love and complacency towards all who are in Christ. This love must be practical, and lead us to help and succour our brethren. Have you this love? Do you feel a delight in the company of the brethren because they belong to Christ, however poor or illiterate they may be? You would not feel love reigning in your spirit if true faith had not come to dwell there. A loving spirit evidenced by a loving life is a true sign that you belong to God, whose name is love. Be of good courage and enter into full assurance, O ye whose bosoms glow with the sacred flame of fervent love to God and men.

Next to that comes *separation from the world.* Read in the second chapter at the fifteenth verse: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." This is backed up by the first verse of the third chapter: "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." Have you met with opposition from the ungodly? Have you discovered that Ishmael still mocks Isaac? Do you find when you go out to work that your shopmates who used to drink with you are inclined to avoid you? Are you pointed at as a hypocrite because you are a Christian? Then there is a difference between you and others, and the world can see it. The serpent's seed will hiss at the seed of the woman: God has put an enmity between the two; do not therefore be surprised at it. Did not our Lord say, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you"? Thus slander, abuse, and other forms of persecution may turn to your comfort by showing that you are of that sect which is everywhere spoken against.

Next to that, in the second chapter, we have the evidence of *continuance in the faith.* "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is

the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." The longer a Christian man is enabled to persevere in holiness, the more confident may he become that his religion is the work of the Spirit of God in his soul. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." Perseverance in holiness is a sure mark of election. It is the righteous who hold on their way; but mere pretenders are as wandering stars and fading flowers. That which comes and goes is not of God: the Holy Spirit abides permanently in true believers.

The next evidence you will find in the third chapter, the third verse, namely, *purification*. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Do you every day endeavour to keep clear of sin; and, when you have sinned, do you at night go with bitter repentance to God, and beg to be delivered from it? Are you fighting against your besetting sins? Do you contend against the customs of the world? Have you come to be a warrior against evil? Let that be an evidence that there is in you a new spirit which was not there by nature, and let that prove to you that you are quickened into newness of life. Conflict and victory are evidences of grace. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Again, in the twenty-first verse of the third chapter, we meet with another blessed evidence, and that is *a clear conscience*,—"If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." They say of us that we seek ourselves, or that we are hypocrites; but if we can lay our hand upon our heart and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou nowest that I love thee," we have the best ground for full assurance. A conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God is one of the seals of the Holy Ghost upon that epistle which he has written in our hearts. This divine witness is a privilege which none possess but the regenerate. Prove yourself clear in the court of conscience that ye may know that ye have eternal life.

Furthermore, we find an evidence in *answers to prayer:* "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." Does God hear your prayers? then you are pleasing in his sight. Are you in the habit of speaking with him, and does he reply to you? then you are agreed with God. Does he grant you the desire of your heart? Is it not because you delight in him? He heareth not those who wilfully live in sin; but if any man doeth his will him he heareth. You may look upon every answered prayer as another token of the love of God toward you in Christ Jesus your Lord.

Adherence to the truth is another help to full assurance. Read the whole fourth chapter: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." In the sixth verse he says, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us." I

read in a certain learned divine the other day a declaration that the evangelical doctrine which we preach is not Christianity, but Paulinism. By that utterance this divine condemned himself. John saith, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." He who hears not the apostles hears not their Master. He who dares say that Paul has not given us the gospel is not of Christ: for Jesus saith, "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." The testimony of the Holy Ghost by apostolic lips is as sure as the testimony by the Son of God himself; and it is flat rebellion against the Holy Ghost to graduate his utterances, whether they be through prophets, apostles, or the Christ himself. He who makes this to be true and that to be false, or this true and that truer still, has disparaged the Spirit of God, who speaketh as he pleases, but is always infallible. He that questions what the Spirit saith hath not the Spirit of Christ dwelling in him. If you have taken Scripture to be your guide, and hold fast by the truth of God, you are one of Christ's sheep, of whom he saith, "A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." Against the detestable spirit of this age, and against everything else that would corrupt the gospel of Christ, it is the mark of the true seed to stand opposed. If you bear witness to the truth, the truth bears witness to you. Blessed are those who are not removed from the hope of their calling.

One of the best evidences of true faith, and one of the best helps to full assurance, is *a holy familiarity with God.* Read in the fourth chapter the sixteenth verse: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us." Oh, beloved brother, if you have come to speak with God as a man speaketh with a man, if you dwell in him, if every day you say more to God than you do to men, and if you find more joy in fellowship with God than you do in all the world beside, then you are one of his. God never made a man to know him and love him, and then cast him away. Eternal life is surely in you if you have entered into the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. When you have no longer that slavish fear which makes you stand back, but that childlike confidence which draws you nearer and yet nearer unto God, then are you his child. The spirit of adoption is one point of sure witness from the Spirit of God. He who can call God his exceeding joy is among the living in Zion.

IV. I would now finish, only I dare not leave out the last point—THE APPENDIX TO JOHN'S DESIGN. The apostle puts it, "That ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." I think he means this—you are never to get into such a state that you say, "I have eternal life, and therefore I need not trust simply in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Years ago I was born again, and so I can now live without the daily exercise of faith." "No," says the apostle, "I

am writing this to believers, and I tell them that while they may have full assurance, it cannot be a substitute for habitual faith in the Lord Jesus." Personally, I wish to say,—it is some thirty-four years since I first believed in the Christ Jesus, and then I came to him as having nothing in myself, and I took him to be my all. At this moment I possess a comfortable and clear assurance that I have eternal life; but my ground of confidence to-day is exactly what it was when first I came to Christ. I have no confidence in my confidence, I place no reliance upon my own assurance. My assurance lies in the fact that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and that "Whosoever believeth in him hath everlasting life": I do believe in him, and therefore I know I have eternal life. Brethren, do not stir beyond that. Keep to your first faith. However far you go in other directions, stand fast in your undivided faith in Jesus. If you think it wise to examine these signs and evidences which I have given you, do so; but if you think to get food out of them you will find a bare cupboard. If you think you can live without Christ, on what you have known in the past, you are greatly mistaken. It is like trying to live on stale manna. None of you would have done that in the wilderness; you would soon have turned up your noses at it. When it was more than a day old it "bred worms and stank." Everything you look to apart from Christ will rot in due time, so that you will loathe it. Beloved, every vessel, whether it be a great flagon or a little cup, must hang upon the one nail which is fastened in a sure place. If you get from Jesus, you wander into a land of darkness and of the shadow of death.

Whether I be a child of God or not is a question I will not discuss to-day. I am a sinner, and Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and they that trust in him are saved. Therefore I trust him! Therefore I am saved! The Word of God declares it. Blessed be his name for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 John v.

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UNDERSTANDEST THOU WHAT THOU READEST?

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MAY 11TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT EXETER-HALL.

"And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth."—Acts viii. 30—33.

How this negro chamberlain of the Queen of Ethiopia came to be a proselyte we do not know. The book which he was so fond of reading may have been the means of leading him to worship the God of Abraham; certainly it has answered that purpose thousands of times. At any rate, he followed the light he had, and though he had not yet come to the full glory of Christianity, it was more than probable that he would do so, because he was evidently prepared to follow truth wherever her flaming torch should lead the way. Oh, that there were more candour among men in these latter days, and less of the prejudice which puts scales upon the eyes of the mind!

Be true to truth as it comes to you. If God gives you only common candle-light, make good use of it; and he will trim your lamp till it shineth like the sevenfold golden light of his holy place. Those who are willing to see God by the moon of nature shall soon be illuminated by the sun of revelation. Instead of complaining that you have no more light, make good use of what you have. Many groan over their inabilities, and yet they have never gone to the end of their abilities: this is sheer hypocrisy.

Having become a proselyte to the faith of Israel, the eunuch made a long and perilous journey to Jerusalem. After he had enjoyed the solemn feast he returned; and while he travelled along, he read the word of God. The book of the prophet Isaiah was the portion chosen for his meditation. Does it not strike you as being remarkable that he should be reading at that moment the best text that Philip could have selected? He had reached a portion of Scripture from which, without the slightest digression, the evangelist preached unto him Jesus as the slain lamb, the willing sacrifice for guilty men. The like conjunction of providence

and the Holy Spirit constantly occurs in conversions. What the man has read in the book, the preacher is often moved by the Spirit of God to declare from the pulpit; for God has servants everywhere, and his secret directions are given out, so that all these servants, though they are little aware of it, are led to work together for the same predestined end. How often have the talks of young men by the wayside been reproduced by the preacher, and such singular coincidences have struck their attention, and been the means of impressing their hearts! God grant there may be something of that kind to-night—I know there will be. Into this hall years ago there strayed a wild young man; he heard me preach, he believed in Jesus, and he has long been an honoured deacon of a suburban church. Are there not other men here to whom the like salvation shall come?

This eminent nobleman is reading. That is a commendable occupation: reading is in itself somewhat of a hopeful sign. In these days we need hardly exhort young men to read. "Give attendance to reading," said the wise apostle Paul, and that was excellent advice for Timothy. Let all Christian men be reading men. But, then, Philip's question contains these words, "what thou readest," and that suggests a necessary enquiry. I am afraid much that is read nowadays had far better be left unread. Multitudes of books are fruits of an accursed tree—the tree of evil knowledge, which is watered by the rivers of perdition. The fruits of this upas-tree will yield no benefit to the minds that feed thereon, but much of solemn damage; by perverting the judgment, or polluting the imagination. Souls have been ruined to all eternity by reading a vile book. Count it no trifle to have heard bad language; but count it a more serious evil to have read a bad book which has wounded your soul, and left a scar upon your conscience. The writer of an evil book is a deliberate poisoner, secretly pouring death into the wells from which men drink. The printers and publishers of such works are accomplices in the crime. Young men, you will read—who among us would wish you to do otherwise?—but take heed what you read! As one who has read more greedily than most men all sorts of books, I bear my testimony that the best of reading is the reading of the best of books. The more we read the Bible and volumes that lead up to the understanding of it, the better for us. I do not like to see in a lending-library all the works of fiction needing to be bound two or three times over, while the books of sober fact and solid teaching, and the works that speak of eternal things, have never been read, since they have not even been cut. I fear that this is the general if not the universal rule. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" is a question I should hardly put until a man has made up his mind that he will not read mere rubbish and falsehood, but will with deep attention read that which is accurate, truthful, devout, and ennobling. Read; take heed what you read; and then seek to understand what you read.

It was a very sharp-pointed question that Philip put to this gentleman. He made honest and earnest use of a rare opportunity for reaching one of the upper ten. We find it tolerably easy to put questions to a man who is poor, but how shall we approach the rich? We have sermons for the working-classes, and it would be a fair and useful thing to have sermons for the House of Peers, and evangelistic

addresses for the Commons! Are there any bigger sinners anywhere than you might find in those two chambers? The rich are neither better nor worse than the poor: the various classes have bad and good in each of them, in much the same proportion. I am persuaded that there are noble lords and honourable gentlemen who would be all the better for a little teaching upon the things of the kingdom of God: for instance, it might do many of them good to hear a plain sermon from, "Ye must be born again." Why is it that we are so apt to be plain-spoken with working-men, and not with their employers? I admire Philip for his outspokenness to the royal treasurer. This gentleman keeps a carriage. Look at his retinue and his brave display! He is a very important personage, and yet Philip, who is nobody in particular, only a poor preacher of the Word, runs up to the chariot, and solemnly asks, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Young men, never be irritated by plain questions from a servant of Christ, or else you will not be as noble as this Ethiopian chamberlain: and, young men, when you know the Lord, do not be ashamed yourselves to put important questions to other people. Bold enquiries often give less offence than the more politic and indirect address which timidity suggests. I fear the world can seldom charge the church with being too violent in its appeals. Look at what the ungodly will do to us. Where can you live in a street of London, especially in this part of the town, without having night made hideous with their loud licentious songs and shouts? They force upon us their irreligion: may we not introduce our religion in return? If we go up to a man straight away, and speak to him in the name of Christ, perhaps he will say, "You intrude." Well, we are not the only people that intrude, for many intrude their filthy tongues upon us as we go down the streets, and force their infidelity upon us in the daily prints. The world sets the fashion, and if we follow its customs it has no right to complain. When the wicked grow so delicate that they are afraid of hurting our feelings by their unbelieving speeches, we may take into consideration how we can go delicately also. Meanwhile, is there anything which a man of God has not a right to say if it be the truth, and if he be earnestly aiming at the salvation of his fellow-men?

This was the question, "*Understandest thou what thou readest?*" Ah, my brothers, you and I have need to understand the Bible. I will suppose you read it—let me hope I am not mistaken; but when you read it, do labour, above all things, to understand it. The Book was written to be understood. It is a book which speaks to us about our lives (for the soul is the true life), and about the bliss eternal, and the way to win it. It must be so written as to be understood, since it were a mockery for God to give us a revelation which we could not comprehend. The Bible was meant to be understood, and it benefits us in proportion as we get at the meaning of it. The mere words of Scripture passing over the ear or before the eye, can do us little good. I heard a person say once, concerning a great doctrine which I hold to be very plainly taught in Scripture, that he had read the Bible through—I think he said six times—on his knees, but he could not find that doctrine. I replied, "Brother, that is an awkward position in which to read the Bible. I should have sat upon a chair, and studied the page

in a natural and easy posture. Moreover, I should not have galloped through it at the rate at which you must have raced over the chapters. I should rather have read a little at a time, and tried to understand it."

"Understandest thou what thou readest?" that is the question. "I read a chapter every morning," says one. Quite right; keep that up, but "Understandest thou what thou readest?" "Well, I learn the daily text." Yes, but "Understandest thou what thou readest?" That is the main point. The butterflies flit over the garden, and nothing comes of their flitting; but look at the bees, how they dive into the bells of the flowers, and come forth with their thighs laden with the pollen, and their stomachs filled with sweetest honey for their hives. This is the way to read the Bible: get into the flowers of Scripture, plunge into the inward meaning, and suck out that secret sweetness which the Lord has put there for your spiritual nourishment. A thoughtful book needs and deserves thoughtful reading. If it has taken its author a long time to write it, and he has written it with much consideration, it is due to him that you give his work a careful perusal. If the thoughts of men deserve this, what shall I say of the supreme thoughts of God which he has written for us in this Book? Let us bend ourselves to the Book; let us ask for increased capacity, and let us use what capacity we already possess to reach the inmost soul of the Word of God, that we may understand it, and be fed thereby. The Bible can be understood, I do assure you. I will not say that any man here understands all of it. I do not believe there is any man alive that does. I could not myself believe in it if I could understand it all—for I should imagine that it came from my equal, and not from that supreme Master mind, whose thoughts must be above our thoughts, even as the heavens are above the earth. All that is right, all that is fundamental, all that is essential to our soul's eternal good, can be understood by the help of God if we desire to understand it. Digest the word, I pray you. Be prepared to answer this question, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Desiring to press that matter upon you, I am going to speak upon three questions somewhat briefly. The first is, *What is most essential to be understood in this Book?* secondly, *What is the test of a man's understanding it?* and, lastly, *What can be done to obtain such a desirable understanding?*

I. WHAT, THEN, IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN THIS BOOK? I do verily believe that it is contained in the passage which the eunuch was reading. It is a very singular passage. A section of the Bible begins at Isaiah liii., and goes onward through several chapters. I will read you a verse or two out of that part which the eunuch would soon have read had he continued to peruse the words of the prophet. Already he had noted the words,—"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." There was something for him, for he had gone astray, and knew his lost estate. Go on to chapter liv., verse 3, and read this, "Thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." He might have thought, "I am one of the Gentiles, and therefore I am of the nations that shall be possessed by the seed." When he reached the fifty-fifth chapter, how his eyes would

sparkle as he began to read, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters"! And this, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." Here, too, he would hear the voice of God inviting men to come to his Anointed, and he would mark that promise, "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God." He would rejoice to see that the Ethiopians were included in those who knew not the Christ, but should, nevertheless, run to him.

I beg you to look at the fifty-sixth chapter and the third verse. I fancy the eunuch had aforetime read the portion; it must have been a favourite passage with him, for it runs thus: "Neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus said the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house, and within my walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters." Was not that pointedly personal, and full of consolation? I do not wonder that he liked to be found reading near such a choice promise, wherein he saw the tender compassion of the Lord for beings who are usually despised.

The passage from which Philip's text was taken contains the most essential thing for every young man to know. Let him know and understand the sixth verse of the fifty-third of Isaiah; it begins with "all" and ends with "all;" therefore carry it in your memories—"*All* we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us *all*." What is wanted is that we first understand that we have *all gone astray*. He who does not know that he has gone astray will not care for the Shepherd who comes to fetch him back again. A humbling, heart-breaking sense of our personal wanderings from the Lord is a main force by which the heavenly Father leads us to the Lord Jesus and his salvation. I want every young man here to know and understand the truth, that *salvation is the gift of divine mercy* to those who are guilty, and is never the reward of human merit. Christ did not come to save you because you are good, for you are not good; nor because you have merit, for you have no merit. He would not have come to save you if you had possessed merit. Why should he? There would have been no need. I hear the doctor's brougham rattling down the street at a great pace, and I wonder where he is going. It never occurs to me that he is rushing to call upon a hale and hearty man. I am persuaded that he is hastening to see one who is very ill, perhaps one in dying circumstances, otherwise he would not drive so fast. It is just so with Jesus Christ. When he is hurrying on the wings of the wind to rescue a child of man, I am sure that the soul he visits is sick with the malady of sin, and that the Physician is making haste because the disease is developing into corruption and death. He came not "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

"Who rightly would his alms dispose
Must give them to the poor;
None but the wounded patient knows
The comforts of a cure."

Jesus will not waste his grace on those who are already good. "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

Oh, that you would also understand the second half of Isaiah's verse, "*The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*"! There is more philosophy in that statement than in all the teachings of Aristotle; there is more truth worth knowing in that one sentence than in all the books of the Alexandrian Library. The Lord Jehovah lifted up the sin of man, and deliberately laid it upon his dear Son. His Son, willingly bearing that load as our Substitute, went up to the tree, and there he bore what was due for all that weight of sin, even the penalty of darkness, desertion, and death. By bearing the chastisement he put away sin, and hurled it into his own sepulchre, wherein it is buried for ever. Now, every man who believes in Jesus may know that his sin was laid upon Christ, and borne by Christ, and put away by Christ. A thing cannot be in two places at one time. If my sin was laid on Christ, it is no longer laid on me. God cannot exact two penalties for the same offence: if he accepted Christ Jesus as my Substitute, then he cannot punish me. God's justice cannot twice demand the penalty—

> "First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
> And then again at mine."

Such an exaction would be a strange confusion and destruction of both love and justice. Such injustice can never be. This is how you are to get rid of your sin. *You* cannot bear it, but Christ bore it; you are to accept Christ as your Sin-bearer, and then you may know that your sins have gone; that the depths have covered them; that there is not one of them left. I sometimes think if men did but understand this they would be sure to accept the Lord Jesus. I heard of a minister in Edinburgh who went to visit one of his poor people. He heard that she was in deep poverty, and therefore he went to take her help. When he came to her house, he could not make anybody hear, though he knocked loud and long. Seeing her some time after, he said, "Janet, I knocked at your door with help for you, but you did not hear me." "What time did you come, Sir?" said she. "It was about twelve o'clock." "Oh," she said, "I did hear you, Sir, but I thought it was the man calling for the rent." Just so. Men do hear the calls of Christ, but they are wilfully deaf, because they think he wants them to do something. But he does not want anything of you; he wants you to receive what he has already done. He comes laden with mercy, with his hands full of blessing, and he knocks at your door: you have only to open it and he will enter in, and salvation will enter with him. Say, "Come in, thou Traveller unknown! What hast thou in thy hands? I gladly accept what thou dost bring." Will not some young man here, who has thought religion to be a hard exaction, change his mind, now that he understands that it is a bountiful boon? Salvation is a gift—a free gift of God. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The Saviour lifts sin from men to himself, and then makes an end of that sin once for all by his death upon the cross. Oh, hear you this, ye guilty ones: there is full salvation presented to you in the word of God—salvation from every sort of evil! You shall be helped to overcome every bad passion, to

conquer every evil habit, to be masters of your own minds, and lords of your own spirits. The Lord Jesus Christ, if you accept him, will come into your heart, and turn out his enemy and yours, and he will reign in you from this time forth and for ever, until he has made you perfect, and fit to dwell with himself in glory. Oh, that you understood this vital point; "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"!

II. WHAT IS THE TEST OF A MAN'S UNDERSTANDING HIS BIBLE, AND OF UNDERSTANDING THIS PASSAGE IN IT?

I answer that the test of a man's understanding this important part of Scripture is that *Jesus Christ is everything to him:* for Philip, who did understand it, when he explained it, preached unto the eunuch Jesus and nothing else. I try with all my might to preach my Lord Jesus Christ, and I love to meet with people who delight in this theme. Certain critics call upon us to preach something fresh. This also will I do, for I will preach Jesus, and he is always fresh: there is nothing stale in him, he has for ever the dew of his youth.

It may be said, "But new doctrines are brought out continually." Yes, but they grow stale in a month; they are a poor kind of Covent Garden stuff, and need to be carted away quickly, else they decay. I have lived to see a score or more sorts of modern theology; they all come and go, but Jesus Christ remains the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

If you have Jesus Christ, you have everything—top, bottom, and middle as well. Have Christ, and nothing else but Christ. You will not be in safety if you rest without having a firm hold of Jesus, the divine Saviour. "Well," says one, "but what do you make of Socinians and Unitarians?" I come to the same conclusion about them as did an old Baptist minister, who was greatly grieved to see a Socinian chapel erected opposite his own. One of his deacons said, "This is a dreadful thing—this opposition shop that has been opened on the other side of the road!" "I don't call it opposition at all," said the minister. The deacon exclaimed, "Why, they are Unitarians; they don't preach the Godhead of Christ!" The old man said, "If you kept a baker's shop, and another man were to open an ironmongery business opposite you, that would not be opposition, for he would be in quite another line. Those who do not preach the deity of Christ are in an altogether different business. If you want ironmongery you may go to them, but if you want the bread of heaven you must look to the Lord Jesus, the Son of the Highest." So if you want to understand the Scripture, test yourself by this: Is Jesus Christ everything to you?

> "You cannot be right in the rest
> Unless you think rightly of him."

You understand the Scripture if you make everything of the Lord Jesus Christ; if you believe on him with all your heart, and then yield yourselves up to him in his own way.

Every young man, when he believes in Jesus, should give himself to Jesus, heart and soul, for ever. "That's the kind of young man for my money, for he is O and O." So spake a certain person, and when he was asked what that meant, he replied, "Out and out for Jesus Christ."

Such a man is precious in these days; yes, precious as the gold of Ophir. Jesus was out and out for us; he loved us, and gave himself for us: there should be no half-heartedness in our dealings with him. If we have read Scripture aright, we have not received the kind of Christianity which sanctifies us on Sunday, but enables us to be dishonest throughout the week. True saints have a religion that has entered into their very blood, changing their nature, and permeating their being, so that it is part and parcel of themselves. Practical Christianity is the only real Christianity. If your religion can be laid aside I would advise you to get rid of it; for a real Christian could no more lay aside his godliness than he could unscrew his head.

I like this eunuch for proposing that he should be baptized. He was not advised to do so, but he proposed it himself, and gave himself up to his Lord and Master to do the Lord's bidding at once, the providence of God having provided water that he might there and then fulfil his Master's command. Young man, whichever way the Scripture bids you dedicate yourself to God, set to work about it, and let it be done at once. Find out what is the scriptural way, and then follow it without delay, surrendering yourself wholly to the Lord: you have not read the Scriptures with understanding unless you do that.

The next thing is, if you have read the Scriptures with a clear understanding, *they have made you glad*, for this eunuch "went on his way rejoicing." The man who gets up from reading his Bible, and says, "I am a believer in Jesus; what a solemn thing it is!" and then goes forth with a pious resolution that he will make everybody as miserable as he can all the day long, wants converting again. The faith of the Scriptures leads joy by the hand, and chases away despair. When true religion comes, its tendency is to make us rejoice in the Lord always; and though we are not as happy as we ought to be, that is not the fault of our faith, but of our unbelief. Fair flowers of Paradise spring up where Faith plants her feet; but thistles grow where doubt abides. Our indigestion, or some other malady may depress us; but faith should make our songs abound even while we are travelling through the wilderness. Joys unspeakable may be ours before we

> "Reach the heavenly fields,
> Or walk the golden streets."

You have not read your Bible so as to understand it to the full, unless you have learned to be happy by a sweet resting in Jesus.

I think you have not understood the Bible unless *it makes you care about the salvation of others;* for this Ethiopian nobleman, when he got home, I have no doubt, spread the gospel throughout his native land: he was, probably, the founder of the Abyssinian Church. If any young man reads this Book aright, he becomes large-hearted; he cannot hold his soul within the narrow bound of his ribs, but his great heart looks out to see where it can scatter benefits. If thou canst let another man be damned without an effort, I fear that such will be thine own end: if thou canst be quiet when thou believest thy brother is on the brink of eternal ruin, I fear thou art on the brink of ruin thyself. One of the holiest instincts born in a renewed man is that of longing to save others. Being saved, we wish to co-operate with the Saviour in

his gracious work. A missionary enthusiasm is the natural result of a clear perception of the true state of matters in reference to the world, which lieth in the wicked one. The heathen die without hope: shall it be always so? Will no young man rescue the perishing? I put it to you from the deeps of my soul, will you not cry, "Here am I, send me!"?

You have read this Book so as to understand it, *if your message to others is what the message was to you*—Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ. You have nothing else to employ as the means of good, except the salvation of Jesus, and there is nothing else worth telling. I heard of a congregation the other day that was so very small that hardly any one came to listen to the preacher. Instead of blaming himself, and preaching better, the minister said he thought he was not doing much good by sermons and prayer-meetings, and therefore he would found a club, and if the fellows came in, and played draughts, that might do them good. What a lot of that sort of thing is now being tried! We are going to convert souls on a new system,—are we? Are we also to have a substitute for bread?—and healthier drink than pure water? We cannot save men by faith in Jesus Christ, and so it seems we are going to try new dodges of our own. We shall reap small, scant sheaves from such wretched seed. If you can do good anyhow, do good anyhow; but to hope ever to bring sinners to holiness and heaven by any teaching but that which begins and ends in Jesus Christ is a sheer delusion. None other name is given among men whereby they can be saved. If you have to deal with highly learned and educated people, nothing is so good for them as preaching Jesus Christ; and if the people be ignorant and degraded, nothing is better for them than the preaching of Jesus. A young man said to another the other day, "I am going down to preach at So-and-so; what sort of people are they there? What kind of doctrine will suit them?" Having heard of the question, I gave this advice,—"You preach Jesus Christ, and that will suit them, I am sure; if they are learned people it will suit them; if they are ignorant it will suit them—God blessing it." When the great Biblical critic, Bengel, was dying, he sent for a young theological student, to whom he said, "I am low in spirit; say something good to cheer me." "My dear Sir," said the student, "I am so insignificant a person, what can I say to a great man like yourself?" "But if you are a student of theology," said Bengel, "you ought to have a good word to say to a dying man; pray say it without fear." "Well, Sir," said he, "What can I say to you, but that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin?" Bengel said, "Give me your hand, young man; that is the very word I wanted." A simple gospel text is the word which every man needs who is in fear of divine wrath, and he may be sitting next to you at this moment, or he is in the same house of business with you, and needs that you should tell him about Christ. Do that, and bless his soul. May you all understand the Scriptures in this way, and may God make you a great blessing to those around you.

III. Now in a few words I want to answer the question, WHAT CAN BE DONE TO OBTAIN SUCH A DESIRABLE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCRIPTURES? "I read the Bible," says one, "and get a great deal puzzled over it." Let me advise that when you read a passage in the Scrip-

tures which you do not understand, you should read it until you do. "I should have to read often." Well, that would not hurt you. "But suppose I never do understand it?" Keep on reading it all the same. "Can passages of Scripture which we do not understand do us any good when we read them?" Yes; they gradually filter into our souls: by long considering them we get light out of them. Here is a little boy whose father is an artisan, and uses a great many technical terms when talking about his work. The boy is apprenticed to the trade, and wants to know all about it, and therefore he listens to his father, and when the day is over he says to himself, "I heard my father say a great deal, but I do not understand much of it." "But you did understand a little of it?" "Oh, yes." To that little he is faithful, and day by day he adds to his store of information, learning more by the help of that which he already knows. He hears his father talk again the next day, and still he does not understand much; but at last, by hearing the terms often, and by meditating upon them, light breaks in, and at length he can talk like his father, using the same words with understanding. So I have found it. When I do not comprehend a chapter, I say,—This is probably comprehensible; I will therefore hear my great Father speak, even if I do not understand at first what he may say to me, and I will keep on hearing him until at last I grasp his meaning. I fear we do not understand some passages because we have not read them often enough, nor thought upon them with full concentration of mind. Once or twice they pass before the mind and produce no impression; let us observe them yet again, and then their effect will be deep and permanent. Do as the photographer does, when he allows an object to be long before the camera until he obtains a well-defined picture. Let your mind dwell on a passage till at last it has photographed itself upon your soul by the light of God.

The next bit of advice I would give is, always read with a desire to understand: always have the crackers with you to crack the nuts, that you may feed upon their kernels. Some may say, when reading the Bible, "That may be a very blessed passage, but I don't in the least know what it means." Be not content to leave the text in that condition. Weep much because no man can open the book, and loose its seven seals. Pray over the words, and study them again and again, till at last you come at the essence of the text. Reading with that view, it is wonderful how soon you will obtain the understanding you seek after.

Next, be sure to pray for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. If you want to understand a book, and you find difficulties in it, do as I have done on several occasions with my contemporaries—write and ask them what they mean by their language. I have in this way obtained much valuable information. Can we do that with the Bible? Assuredly we can if we know how to pray. The Author of the Bible is never more pleased than when we go directly to him to ask him what he means. He puts himself at the disposal of every earnest student to open up by means known to himself those Scriptures which he hath himself dictated. "I consulted a learned commentator," says one. Very well; at the same time, to go to a commentator upon a book is not half so certain a mode of procedure as to go to the author of the book. Seek instruction of the blessed Spirit by humble prayer.

Remember that you can also go to the Maker of your mind, and he can open it to receive the truth. Your mind is out of order, and it is no wonder, considering its serious damage by the Fall, and the atmosphere of sin which surrounds it in this present evil world. My mind, I know, is very likely to be in a disorderly state; it has for fifty years been always at work, and I think it must by this time be like an old clock that has grown rusty or dusty. I find my brains want clearing out a bit; and I believe that this is the case with you young men, too. You are either very busy, or else very careless, and the dust of care or neglect spreads over your brain. Who can set the brain right? The Creator who made the brain. The Holy Spirit has a wonderful power in clearing the intellect. You shall study for a month and make no headway; but you shall pray to God about a spiritual truth, and it shall be clear to you in a minute. There are multitudes of instances in which men have turned dark problems over and over again in their minds, and have never solved them by their own mental efforts; but one flash of Divine light has made everything bright as noonday. Wait, then, upon the Author of the Book, and then wait upon the Author of yourself, and say, "Lord, as thou openest the Scriptures, so open my understanding that I may perceive their meaning."

I would earnestly entreat every man who desires to understand the Bible to consider at this moment the vital point of his natural condition, and the way of salvation from it. You are lost, dear friend. If you are an unconverted man you are still lost, and you cannot save yourself; it is impossible that you should. You may have heard the story of that philosopher who was once on the roof of a house, when suddenly behind him came a strong man with a huge whip, and told him to jump down to the ground. Certain death would have been the result. The man was a lunatic. The philosopher perceived that terrible fact in a moment, and so he very wisely said, "Well, you see, any fool can jump down, the grand thing would be to jump up. Let us go down, and jump up." They went down, but they never jumped up, for the gentleman thus escaped. Are there not some here who are jumping down? some young men who are taking a desperate leap to one sin or another? Any fool can jump down; but if any of you are already down, I defy you to jump up again. No, you need a greater power than your own before you can ascend the heights of holiness. If you have tried to jump up, I know, young man, you have fallen back in despair. Easy is the descent to hell, the gravitation of our nature tends that way; but to retrace our steps, this is the work, this is the difficulty. Turn that over in your mind, and say, "If there be salvation to be had, since I cannot work out my own rescue without divine grace, I will trust in Jesus." Oh, that you would seek his grace at once!

I tried to preach the gospel just now; let me again put it simply. A negro worded it thus, "*Christ die, me not die*," and that is the gospel; Christ dies that you may not die. Only trust him, and you are saved.

When you are about it, dear young friend, I beseech you to trust Christ out and out. A homely parable will illustrate what I mean. A father, it is said, had to go one night along the top of a rugged and very slippery precipice. His two boys were with him, and when he started,

one boy said, "Father, I will take hold of your hand." He did so, and it seemed a very wise thing to do. The other boy said, "Father, take hold of my hand," and, as it turned out, that was a much more prudent course; for the first youngster clung to his father's hand until he grew weary, and when they were in a very frightful place he failed to hold on, and down he went; but the other trudged along right merrily, for he was not dependent upon his hold of his father's hand—all depended upon the father's hold of him. Now come, young man, and begin as you mean to go on. Put yourself right into the hand of the Lord Jesus for him to keep you. When I was a lad I heard a preacher say that Christ gave to his sheep eternal life, and that they should never perish; for he would keep them to the end. This charmed me. I longed to find this sure salvation. I thought within myself, "I know James So-and-so, and Tom So-and-so, who went up to London, and who were about a year older than I, and they, within half-a-dozen years, were as far gone in vice as well could be. They were better boys when they were at school than I was, and yet they went to the bad. I may go and do the same thing as they did unless I get this eternal salvation. I may lose my situation, or be found pilfering, or something of that sort, for I have as bad a heart as they have." I looked upon salvation as a spiritual insurance, which would guarantee my character. So I tried the promise, and now, at the age of fifty, I place myself under the care of the Lord Jesus as I did at the age of fifteen; he has kept me to this day, and I believe he will never let me go, however long I may live. Oh, young man, give yourself up to that dear pierced hand wholly and heartily! Let your motto be, "Jesus only." Trust Christ a little, and yourself a little, and, like a man who plants one foot on the rock and the other on the quicksand, you will go down. Trust in him alone, and he will hold you fast. If Jesus does not save me, I shall be lost, for I cannot save myself. It is his business to save me, for both by name and office he is Jesus, the Saviour; and I rest quite happily in him.

When we meet in heaven we shall praise the Lord for making us understand what we read. God bless you all, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts viii. 26—40.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—478, 483, 486.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE GLORY IN THE REAR.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 3RD, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night."—Exodus xiv. 19, 20.

"The glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward."—Isaiah lviii. 8.

"For the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward."—Isaiah lii. 12.

WHEN the Israelites left the place of their bondage and came to the edge of the wilderness, a visible token of the Lord's presence and leadership was granted to them. They saw high in the air a pillar, which by day might be compared to rising smoke, but at night became a flame of fire. Such displays on a small scale were usual in the march of armies, but this was of supernatural origin. Where it moved the people were to follow; it was to be their companion, that they might not be alone; their conductor, that they might not go astray. We have become familiar, by accounts of our own soldiery in Egypt, with the extreme danger of the oriental sun when men are marching over the fiery sand: this cloud would act as a vast umbrella tent, covering the whole of the great congregation, so that they could march without being faint with the heat. By night their canvas city was lighted up by this grand illumination. They could march as well by night as by day, for we are told at the close of the previous chapter that by night the Lord went before them "in a pillar of fire, to give them light; *to go by day and night.*" Might they not have said, "The Lord God is a sun and shield"? Did they not realise the fulfilment of the promise not yet spoken in words, "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night"? This sacred symbol of the divine presence must have been a very great solace to them in those early days, when their pilgrim life was novel to them, and their newly-found liberty was darkened by a terrible fear of recapture.

The particular sign which the Lord vouchsafed them was very practical; it was not only *glorious,* but *useful;* it served them both for

shade and light, and was both their guide and guard. It was exceedingly *conspicuous*, so that they could all see it. Any man of the millions who came out of Egypt could stand at his tent door and see this flaming signal high in heaven, floating over all as the banner and oriflamme of the Great King. It appears to have been *continual;* an abiding token, and not an intermittent brightness. Even thus has Moses written:—"He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people."

Beloved friends, God is always with those who are with him. If we trust him, he hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." There is a special and familiar presence of God with those who walk uprightly, both in the night of their sorrow, and in the day of their joy. Yet we do not always in the same way perceive that presence so as to enjoy it. God never leaves us, but we sometimes think he has done so. The sun shines on, but we do not always bask in his beams; we sometimes mourn an absent God—it is the bitterest of all our mourning. As he is the sum total of our joy, so his departure is the essence of our misery. If God do not smile upon us, who can cheer us? If he be not with us, then the strong helpers fail, and the mighty men are put to rout. It is concerning the presence of God that I am going to speak this morning. You and I know how joyous it is. May we never be made to know its infinite value experimentally by the loss of it. If we see no cloud or flame, yet may we know that God is with us, and his power is around us. In that sense we will pray,

> "Cover us with thy cloudy shrine,
> And in thy fiery column shine."

Or in more familiar words we will sing,

> "Let the fiery cloudy pillar
> Lead me all my journey through."

I. In considering the subject of the Lord's abiding with his people, I shall first call attention to THE DIVINE PRESENCE MYSTERIOUSLY REMOVED. According to our text, "The angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed." The chosen of the Lord may lose the manifested presence of God; and, indeed, often they may miss it in the particular form in which they have been accustomed to enjoy it.

The symbol of God's presence removed *from where it had usually been.* From the day when they entered upon the desert, they had seen the fiery, cloudy pillar well to the front; but now suddenly it wheeled about, and left the van comparatively dim, because the glory had departed. Those who looked forward saw it no more. So has it been with us at times: we have walked day after day in the light of God's countenance, we have enjoyed sweet fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord, and on a sudden we have missed his glorious manifestation. Like the spouse, we cried, "I sought him, but I found him not." Aforetime everything had seemed bright, and we expected to go from strength to strength, from victory to victory, till we came unto the mount of God, to dwell for ever in his rest; but now before us on a sudden things look dark; we do not feel so sure of heaven as we were, nor so certain of perpetual growth and progress. The prospect is darkened, the clouds

return after the rain, and our soul out of the darkness cries, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

Moreover, they missed the light *from where they hoped it would always be.* They had been given to understand, I do not doubt, that the Lord would be always with them; and yet now, as they looked forward, the bright light was gone from its place of leadership. They looked for it as their guide, and, behold, that guidance was gone! The pillar might be behind them, but it was not before them; they could see nothing ahead to lead them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which the Lord had promised them. Sometimes you also may imagine that God's promise is failing you; even the word of God which you had laid hold upon may appear to you to be contradicted by your circumstances. Then your heart sinks to the depths, for "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" If ever the word of God becomes a subject of doubt, where can any certainty remain? Where any hope for the future? We have said, "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death": but what if he refuse to guide us? Then are we in an evil case. Can it be so? "Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore?"

The pillar of fire also removed *from where it seemed more than ever to be needed.* Now they were in a cleft stick; how could they possibly escape? Pharaoh was behind them, with all the horsemen of Egypt. They could hear the noise of the chariots, and the neighing of the horses, and the shouts of the armies, eager for the prey. Before them rolled the Red Sea in its might. How could there be a way in the mighty waters? Now, if ever in their lives, they must have looked anxiously for the symbol of the Divine presence. What could they do if Jehovah did not lead their van? Yet the token of his presence was not there. Even thus is it with you, dear friend, who once walked in the light of God's countenance: you perhaps have fallen into temporal trouble, and at the same moment the heavenly light has departed from your soul. Now, it is bad to be in the dark on the king's highway; but it is worse to be in the dark when you are out on the open common, and do not know your road. It is well to have a guide when the road is easy; but you must have one when you are coming upon precipitous and dangerous places. Is it so with any child of God here, that he sees no light to shine before him, no star to guide him on his road? On the contrary, does his future become more and more clouded? Is the track quite gone? Does the sea seem shut in with an ironbound coast without a harbour? Does he

> "See every day new straits attend,
> And wonder where the scene will end"?

Then let him trust; but he will need all the faith of which he can be master. Oh, my Lord, if ever thou dost leave me, forsake me not in the day of trouble. Yet what have I said? It is a day of trouble when thou art gone, whatever my condition may be. Yet, brethren, our Lord said, "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter." Pray that if you must for a while bewail the Lord's absence from you, it may not be in a time of dire and dark necessity.

Thus it did seem a mysterious thing that the Covenant Angel should

no longer direct the marchings of the host of God, and I dare say that some of them began to account for it *by a reason which their fears would suggest.* Naturally, there was only one way of accounting for this removal of the guide, and that way was a wrong one, but one to which the Lord's people often refer their trials. I should not wonder that, if they had been asked why the blazing pillar was no longer in the van, they would have replied, "Because of our murmurings against the Lord and his servant Moses. God will not go before us because of our sins." Now, it is true, and does happen, that the Lord often hides his face behind the clouds of dust that his own children make by their sins; but this is not always the case. When the consolations of God are small with you, you may generally conclude that there is some secret sin with you; and then it is your duty to cry, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." But in this case God was not punishing them for their sins, as he did on after occasions. He seems to have been very patient with their early murmurings, because they were such feeble folk, so unused to pilgrimage, and so unfit for anything heroic. Every trial was severe to the raw, undisciplined spirits of the tribes, and therefore the Lord winked at their follies. There was not a touch of the rod about this withdrawing of his presence from the van, not even a trace of anger; it was all done in loving-kindness and tender mercy, and no sort of chastisement was intended by it. So, dear child of God, you must not always conclude that trouble is sent because of wrath, and that the loss of conscious joy is necessarily a punishment for sin. Such thoughts will be a case of knives cutting your heart in pieces. Do not make for yourself a needless pain. All trouble is not chastisement; it may be a way of love for your enriching and ennobling. Upon the black horse of trouble the Lord sends his messengers of love. It is a good thing for us to be afflicted; for thus we learn patience, and attain to assurance. Shall the champion who is bidden to go to the front of the battle think that he is punished thereby? No, verily, my brethren: whom the Lord loveth he sets in the heat of the conflict, that they may earn the rarest honours. Great suffering and heavy labour are often rewards of faithfulness. Know ye not how the poet puts it,—

> "If I find him, if I follow,
> What his guerdon here?
> 'Many a labour, many a sorrow,
> Many a tear'"?

Darkness of soul is not always the fruit of divine anger, though it is often so. Sometimes there is no trace of wrath in it: it is sent for a test of faith, for the excitement of desire, and for the increase of our sympathy with others who walk in darkness. When the cloud of the divine glory is no longer seen in front it has gone behind, because it is more wanted there, and it is no loss after all, as we shall have to show. When the Lord hides his face for a moment, it is to make us value his face the more, to quicken our diligence in following after him, to try our faith, and to test our graces. There are a thousand precious uses in this adversity. Yet it is a mysterious thing when the light of the future fades, and we seem to be without a guide.

II. Now, secondly, all this while THE DIVINE PRESENCE WAS

GRACIOUSLY NEAR. The angel of the Lord had removed, but it is added, he "removed and *went behind them,*" and he was just as close to them when he was in the rear, as when he led the van. He might not seem to be their guide, but he had all the more evidently become their guard. He might not for the moment be their Sun before, but then he had become their Shield behind. "The glory of the Lord was their rereward." The Lord may be very close to thee, dear child, when thou canst not see him, perhaps closer than ever he was when thou couldst see him. The presence of God is not to be measured by thy realization of it. When thou canst not tell that he is with thee at all, and thou art sighing and crying after him, those very sighs and cries after him are the holy fruit of his secret presence. It may be, the day shall come when thou shalt think that he was more near thee when thine eyes were filled with weeping after him, than when thou didst take thine ease, and speak confidently. Much of the creature, much of human excitement will mix with our most spiritual joy; our groanings and our sorrows, when we are pining after the Lord, are often more purely spiritual than our own delights, and therefore they are all the surer proofs of the work of the Lord in our souls. Oh, soul, the Lord may be very near thee, and yet he may be behind thee, so that thine outlook for the future may not be filled with the vision of his glory.

Note in the text that it is said the pillar went, and "*stood behind them.*" I like that, for it is a settled, permanent matter. The Lord had removed, but he was not removing still. He would stay as long as was needful where he then was. That glorious angel, shrouded in the clouds, stood with his drawn sword in the rear of Israel, saying to Pharaoh, "Thou darest not come further; thou canst not break in upon my chosen." He lifted up his vast shield of darkness, and held it up before the tyrant king, so that he could not strike, nay, could not see. All that night his horses champed their bits, but could not pursue the flying host. "They were as still as a stone till thy people passed over, O Lord, till thy people passed over whom thou hadst purchased." It is glorious to think that the Lord stood there, and the furious enemy was compelled to halt. Even thus the Lord remaineth with the dear child of God. Thou canst not see anything before thee to make thee glad, but the living God stands behind thee to ward off the adversary. He cannot forsake thee. He saith to thee out of the pillar of cloud, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." He standeth fast as thy rock, steadfast as thy safeguard, sleepless as thy watcher, valiant as thy champion.

"God is near thee, therefore cheer thee,
Sad mind!
He'll defend thee, all around thee,
And behind."

What is more, these people had God so near that *they could see him if they did but look back.* Earnestly I desire you to think of this. If you cannot see the Lord bright before you, and you are very dull and heavy, then, I pray you, look back and see how the Lord has helped you hitherto. Sit not down with your eyes shut, but look back! Steadily

observe the past! What see you there? Loving-kindness and tender mercy, and nothing else. As I look back upon my own past life—and I think I am not one by myself—I cannot discover, even with the quick eye of selfishness, anything of which I can complain of my God. "Truly God is good to Israel." "His mercy endureth for ever." Not one good thing hath failed: he has never left me, nor forsaken me. I have received blessings through my joys, and even greater blessings through my sorrows. The Lord's way has been all goodness, undiluted goodness, all the while. I look back, and see the light of his presence shining like the sun at noon; it is as a morning without clouds; I am overwhelmed with the boundless bounty of my God. I am unable to conceive of anything more kind than the heart of God towards his unworthy child. Well, then, God is not far away; if we look backward he is there. He has been mindful of us, he will bless us. He gave us mercies yesterday; and he is the same to-day and for ever. The blessings of last night we have not forgotten; the blessings of this morning, are they not still with us? The fountain will not fail: it has flowed too long for us to raise the question. If there be no light breaking in the east, behold, it is lighting up the western sky. The Lord is evidently still behind us, and it is enough; for we can sing, "The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted." "He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him."

A thoughtful person would conclude the Lord to be *all the more evidently near because of the change of his position.* When a symbol of mercy comes to be usual and fixed, we may be tempted to think that it remains as a matter of routine. If the rainbow were always visible it might not be so assuring a token of the covenant. Hence the Lord often changes his hand, and blesses his people in another way, to let them see that he is thinking of them. If he always did the same by us, every day and every night, we should get to attribute his dealings to some fixed law operating apart from God, just as our modern philosophers dethrone the Lord to set up the calves of nature. But now, when our God is sometimes before us, and sometimes behind us, and makes those apparent changes because of deep and urgent reasons, we are compelled to feel that we are the objects of his constant solicitude. "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me." He deals with us in all wisdom and prudence. His modes change, but the changes are all from the same motive, and with the same reason, all to make us sick of self and fond of him. Blessed be his name, the change of his operations makes us feel the unchangeableness of his design; and the different ways in which he visits us only makes us value each visit the more.

III. Thirdly, let us see THE DIVINE PRESENCE WISELY REVEALED. That the symbol of God's presence should be withdrawn from the front and become visible behind, was a wise thing.

Observe, there was no fiery pillar of cloud before them, and that was wise; for *the going down into the Red Sea was intended to be an act of lofty faith.* The more of the visible the less is faith visible. The more you have of conscious enjoyment the less room there is for simple trust. Faith performs her greatest feats in the darkest places. These Israelites

were to do what after all was a grandly glorious thing for them to do,—to march right down into the heart of the sea. What people ever did this before? Modern haters of miracle may say that they passed over the sands at an unusual tide, and that an extraordinarily strong wind drove back the water and left a passage; but that is not the notion of the Holy Spirit. He says by his servant Moses, "The floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea." It is also written, "But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left." The tribes went down into the dread valley which remained when the waters dried up, and they crossed over between two frowning walls of water. You and I would have needed great faith to have gone down into such an abyss as that; but they descended without fear. Moses lifting up his rod and the waters rolling apart to make them a passage-way, with no fiery cloudy pillar in front of them, they calmly marched into the heart of the sea. That was a grand act of faith. This would not have been so clearly of faith had the way been made easier by miracle and token. I know some of you who are Christian people want to be always coddled and cuddled, like weakly babies. You pine for love-visits and delights, and promises sealed home to your heart. You would live on sweetmeats and be wheeled in a spiritual perambulator all the way to heaven; but your heavenly Father is not going to do anything of the sort. He will be with you, but he will try your manhood, and so develop it. I have seen children cosseted into the grave by their fond mother; and I suppose that a great many more will follow in the same way; but God never spoils his children. He educates them for nobler ends. He takes visible guides away from them that they may exercise faith in him. Why, Job would have been nobody if he had not lost everything. Who would have heard of the patriarch of Uz? What glory would he have brought to God with his camels and his oxen and his children? These were all taken away, and then Job became famous. See how he sits on the dunghill and is much more noteworthy there than Solomon in all his glory. Where the word of king Solomon was there was power, but nothing to equal the power of Job's word when he blessed the God who taketh away. Solomon spake many proverbs, and wrote many songs; but none of them attained unto the glory of that saying,—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Here was a triumph of faith! Beloved, you and I lose the enjoyments of religion and the comforts of hope in order that we may walk by faith and not by sight, and may the more greatly glorify God.

Moreover, let us mark that the cloudy pillar was taken away from the front because *the Lord meant them simply to accept his word as their best guidance.* The Lord said to Moses, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." That word was sufficient guide. Suppose they had said, "Lord, we will go forward if the fiery pillar leads us forward, but not else." What then? Why, they would have been rebels. We are to obey God's word as God's word. I heard a brother say some time ago that he should be baptized when it was laid home to him. I thought of what a father would say to his boy if he said, "Father, I shall obey you if it is laid home to me." In all probability the child

would have it laid home to him more feelingly than he desired. There are some disobedient children in the Lord's family who, if they do not mind, will have scriptures laid home to them in a way they do not quite reckon upon. What have you and I to guide us but the word of the Lord? "Well," says one, "I guide myself by outward providences." Do you? You will get into a terrible maze one of these days. Jonah wanted to flee from the presence of the Lord, and therefore he went down to the seaside, and lo, he found a ship going to Tarshish. Might he not have said, "I must be in the way of duty in going to Tarshish, for no sooner did I go down to the wharf than I found a ship starting immediately, and a cabin vacant for a passenger. I paid my fare, and walked on board at once. I had not to go off to the shipping-agent's, and wait for the next liner, but all was prepared for me. Was not that a providence!" Yes, but if you get following providence, and turning aside from the word, you may soon find yourself in the sea, and no whale prepared for you. Our way is clearly set before us in the word of God, and that most sure word of testimony should be followed. I have known a brother wanting to go abroad to preach the gospel to the heathen, but a great many difficulties have been thrown in his way, and therefore he has said, "I can see that I am not called to go." Why not? Is no man called unless his way is easy? I should think myself all the more called to a service if I found obstacles in my way. The course of true service never did run smooth. I should say, "The devil is trying to hinder me, but I will do it in spite of all the devils in hell." Will you always be wanting to have your bread buttered for you on both sides? Must your road be gravelled, and smoothed with a garden roller? Are you a carpet knight, for whom there is to be no fighting? You are not worthy to be a soldier of Jesus Christ at all if you look for ease. Go home! I dare say, after all, it is the best thing you can do. True believers expect difficulties. It is ours to do what we are bidden to do, not to act according to fancied indications of providence. When the Lord said "Forward!" forward Israel must go, without a fiery cloudy pillar to cheer the way. Has not the Lord spoken? Who shall ask for plainer guidance?

Moreover, God was teaching them another lesson, namely, that *he may be near his people when he does not give them the usual tokens of his presence.* Who shall say that God was not in the van of Israel when they went down into the sea? They could not see the ensign of his presence, but he could see their obedience to his bidding. How else did the sea in fright draw back? Was it not because the Lord rebuked the sea? The strong east wind did not of itself divide the sea; for a wind naturally strong enough for that would have blown all the people into the air. The wind was used of God to move the waters, but its chief object was to dry up the damp from the floor of the sea, and to make marching the more easy for the vast host of Israel. Truly the Lord was there, triumphing gloriously. No cloudy pillar was seen across the waters as Israel looked forward to the shore; but yet the Lord was there majestically; and you may have but little comfort of the Lord's presence at this time, and yet God may be with you wondrously. Do not so much set your heart upon comfort, but rejoice in the fact which gladdened Hagar in the wilderness: "Thou God seest me."

It does not matter to the fire whether the logs are cast upon it from the front, or the oil poured upon it secretly from behind the wall, so long as it finds its fuel. To you the daily supply of grace is more important than the supply of comfort, and this shall never fail you so long as you live.

Let me whisper to you one word more. After all, *the host of Israel did not require any guide in front when they came to the sea.* "How is that?" say you. Why, beloved, there were no two ways to choose from: they could not miss the way, for they must needs march through the sea. No room for wandering remained: their road was walled up, and they could not miss it. So when men come into deep trouble, and cannot get out of it, they scarcely need a guide; for their own plain path is submission and patience. Tried child of God, you have to bear your trouble, and when that is quite clear your way is no longer doubtful. Cast all your care on him who careth for you, and in patience possess your soul. "Oh, but I thought I was going to find a way of escape made for me." Listen! "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, *that ye may be able to bear it.*" You have to bear it, you see. Your great want for this present is faith in God, who has said—"I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea." Thus, you see, the light for guidance was not needed just then.

What they did want was the pillar of cloud behind them, and that is where they had it. What was that cloud behind them for? Well, it was there for several reasons: the first was to shut out the sight of their enemies from them. We read that Israel lifted up their eyes and saw the Egyptians, and then they began to tremble, and cry out: and so God drew the blinds down that his poor children could not see their frightful taskmasters. It is a great mercy when God does not let us see everything. What the eye does not see, perhaps the heart will not rue. May I ask you just to try and use your eyes a little now? There are your sins; will you look back on them for a minute? Look steadily. They are quite as dreadful as the Egyptian horsemen and chariots. I have looked intently, and I cannot see a sin remaining. "What, have you lived such a life that you have never sinned?" Ah, no, beloved, I have to mourn over many offences; but I cannot see one of them now, for my sin is covered. I believe this text, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." If I am cleansed, why should I see spots, or speak as if I did? The Lord stands between his people and their sins. Jesus, who veiled his glory in the cloud of our humanity, interposes between us and our transgressions. Is it not written, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found; for I will pardon them whom I reserve"? If God declares that our sins cannot be found, then I am sure we need not look for them; and if he says that Christ has made an end of sin, then there is an end of it. The Egyptians shall not come near us all the night of this life; and when the morning breaketh, we shall see them dead upon the shore. Then shall we sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously, and our transgressions and iniquities hath he cast into the depths of the sea.

"Ah," saith one, "I know that my sins are forgiven, but I am

troubled about my circumstances." Will you now look back with all your eyes? How about the circumstances you have passed through? Do you see anything wrong about them now? Oh, no, say you, they were all right. As you look back you can only see the glory of God: the Lord hath led you by a right way. Very well: learn to look at your circumstances through the light God hath set between Israel and the Egyptians. Who is he that can harm us? What is there to distress us? See your circumstances through the medium of the love of Jesus, and you perceive all things working for your good. Hitherto the Lord hath been our shield and our exceeding great reward. We see now no evil occurrent; he hath turned for us the curse into a blessing. The Lord has caused us to be far from fear, and has put terror far away.

The cloudy pillar went behind for another reason, namely, *that the Egyptians might not see them.* Their enemies were made to stumble, and were compelled to come to a dead stand. "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them." Why does he halt? Why does the lion pause when about to spring? He is blindfolded. He shivers in the dense blackness, bethinking him of that former day when all the land of Mizraim quailed beneath a darkness that might be felt. Be calm, O child of God; for the Covenant Angel is dealing with your adversaries, and his time is generally the night. You will hear by-and-by of what he has done. Meanwhile, remember what he did to Pharaoh and Sennacherib. The Lord may not be before you, shedding delight upon your face, but he is behind you, holding back the foe. He looks forth from the cloud and discomforts your foes. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." Wherefore, stand still, and see the salvation of God!

IV. Now, beloved, I must draw towards a conclusion by observing that THE DIVINE PRESENCE WILL ONE DAY BE MORE GLORIOUSLY REVEALED. I have been speaking about the Lord being the rereward of his people, and so explaining my second text: but I must now refer you to my last text, in the fifty-second of Isaiah—"The Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward." This is the condition into which the Lord brings his people when they depart from Babylon, and are no more conformed to this present evil world. I trust he has brought many of us into this all-surrounding light at this good hour. The Lord is behind us, we know: our sins and iniquities are covered, our past mistakes are all erased, we are accepted in the Beloved. But we have not to look forward and say, "The angel of God has removed." Oh, no; we can see the bright light before us still. Our ways are ordered of the Lord, and none of our steps shall slide. We glory in tribulations also, believing that we shall glorify God in them. We look forward to the time of old age, believing that to hoar hairs he is the same, and that in our days of decline he will carry us. We look forward to the advent of our Lord with delight; or, if that may not be in our day, we look to falling asleep upon the bosom of our Saviour. Before us we see the resurrection morning and all its splendour: we anticipate the risen body, that glorified fabric in which our pure and perfect spirits shall dwell for ever: we hear the voice of harpers harping with

their harps, saluting the reign of Christ and the glorification of his people with him. Below there is nothing before us now but that which is inexpressibly delightful: the day has long dawned with us, whose morning clouds have passed away; a day which grows warmer and brighter, and is nearing to the perfect day. A few more months, a few more years, and we shall be in the land of the unclouded sky. What will it be to be there! What will it be to be there for ever!

"Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in."

How willingly would I fly away and be at rest. I feel my wings; they are not strong enough, as yet, to bear my soul away; but they will be. God is making his children ready to depart, and he will only have to beckon them, and they will cry, "Here am I," and then they shall be with him for ever. Yes, the glory of the Lord is above us and beneath us, on the right hand and on the left, without us and within us. We depart not from it, though it is behind us: we are going ever into the glorious light, for it is before us, too. The Lord shall be a wall of fire around about us, and the glory in the midst. If you have come there, dear brother, stop there. If you have entered there, dear sister, never quit that charmed circle, but abide in full communion with the Lord your God.

V. But now I have a sorrowful word to say, and with that I have done. THIS DIVINE PRESENCE HAS A TWOFOLD ASPECT: that same glory which lit up the canvas city, and made it bright as the day, darkened all the camps of Egypt. They could see nothing, for the dark side of *God* was turned to them. I am afraid it is so with some of you. Oh, dear friends, is it not a dreadful thing that to some men the most terrible thing in the world would be God? If you could get away from God, how happy, how merry, how jolly you would be! You want to depart from him; you are departing from him. One of these days Jesus will tell you to depart. "Keep on as you were," says he, "you were always departing from God; keep on departing. Depart from me, ye cursed!" That will be the consummation of your life. To some of us the thought of God is joy, but to the ungodly nothing would be such good news as to hear that there was no God; indeed, they find a dreadful comfort in endeavouring to be sceptical and unbelieving. God has a dark side to sinners; his justice and his righteousness, which are the comfort of his people, are the despair of the wicked.

The word of God has a dark side to sinners. I will tell you what they say: they say, "We do not understand this Book, it is so full of mystery. We find it full of dark sayings, and hard things, and things difficult to be believed. It is all knots and snarls." Just so; you are an Egyptian, it is dark to you. Let me call up the smallest babe in grace, and say, "Dear child, is that what the Bible is to you?" "Oh, no," he says, "it is my joy and my delight. I may not understand it all, but I love it all, and I feed on it all." Oh, it is a good thing when you cannot understand a revealed truth to feed on it, and when you find it to be good for your soul, you will not complain of its mystery. The Bible is dark to the Egyptians, but it is light to Israel.

Now look at *the gospel* itself. Why, there are many that sit and hear

the gospel, and they say, "I do not understand this believing, this atonement, and so on." No, I know you do not; you are an Egyptian, it is dark to you. It is a savour of death unto death to you. I am afraid you will go on quarrelling with it until God ends the quarrel in your destruction. But if you are one of his, you will quarrel no longer, you will say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. The blessed way of salvation by atoning blood I do accept with avidity, and rejoice in it." That will prove you to be an Israelite; it will be a savour of life unto life to you.

Why, even the blessed *Lord Jesus Christ* has a dark side for sinners. If he were to come here this morning, oh, how gladly would I stand back to let him come forward and show his surpassing beauty. Why, some of you would think it heaven if you could but see him here and look into his pierced hands and side, and mark that blessed, marred, unutterably lovely visage. Yes, but it could not bring any joy to you who do not love him. You do not trust him; and if the news were given out, "Christ has come," why, you would swoon with fear in your pews, for you would say, "He has come to judgment, and I am unprepared. He that is not my Saviour will be my judge, and sentence me to everlasting woe." There is a dark side in the Mediator to the Egyptians while there is a bright side to Israel.

Oh that ye would believe in Jesus Christ! Oh that ye would "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little," for "Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." You can come and be numbered with Israel, for the door into Israel is Christ himself. If you come to Christ you have come to his people, you have come to safety, and henceforth "the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward." Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus xiii. 20—22; xiv. 1—20; Isaiah lii.

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"RETURN, RETURN, O SHULAMITE; RETURN, RETURN!"

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 10TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies."—Solomon's Song vi. 13.

THE translation into the word "Shulamite" is unhappy: it is unmusical, and misses the meaning. The Hebrew word is a feminine of "Solomon." "Solomon" may stand for the bridegroom's name, and then the well-beloved bride takes her husband's name in a feminine form of it, which is Shulamith, Salome, or perhaps better "Solyma." The King has named his name upon her, and as Caius has his Caiia, so Solomon has his Solyma. He is the Prince of Peace, and she is the Daughter of Peace. Aforetime she was called "the fairest among women," but now she is espoused unto her Lord, and has a fulness of peace. Therefore is she called the Peace-laden, or the Peace-crowned. You know how truly it is so with the justified in Christ Jesus. Because the sound is sweeter, and the sense is clearer, permit me to read the text thus—"Return, return, O Solyma: return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in Solyma? As it were the company of two armies." May the Holy Spirit, like a dove, rest upon us while we linger amid the verses of this Song of Loves.

A soul redeemed by blood, and brought by the Holy Spirit into loving, living, lasting union with the Well-Beloved, cannot remain unnoticed. Solomon is known all over the world; Solomon is sought after for his wisdom, and therefore Solyma will shine with something of his brightness, and she will be enquired after too. In the Church of God no man liveth unto himself, or travelleth through the world unwatched. If you are interested in Christ, heaven and earth and hell will be interested in you. Some men are but as a chip in the porridge; they have no savour in themselves, and none comes from them; but the believing man, the Christ-communing man, is full of influences both repellent and attractive, and he may be sure that where he comes he will be known and read. As the house of Israel is among the nations like a burning torch in dry stubble, so also are the spiritual Israel. Voices will cry after the bride

of Christ, "Return! Return! Return! Return!" A pilgrim bound for the Celestial City cannot go through the world, even through the worst part of it, such as Vanity Fair, without being noticed, and questioned, and sought after, and if possible ensnared. Do not think, thou who hast been made a living man by the quickening of the Holy Ghost, that thou canst glide through this world as the spiritually dead can do, for they may be quietly borne along to the place of corruption: the life within thee is too strange, too operative to be overlooked. Thou art a wonder unto many, and thou mayest well be so, for God hath wrought great marvels in thee and for thee. Beloved, ye are the Lord's witnesses, and witnesses must not skulk away in the background or remain dumb. When they bear their honest witness it is in open court, where they will be heard and regarded by all who are concerned in the suit, whether *pro* or *con*. Oh, saints of God, you are never unobserved; you are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, and none of these witnesses are indifferent to you: they all watch you with steady gaze to see how you run your race. The good are intent that you should so run as to obtain; and there are evil ones who long for your defeat. Solyma is addressed by urgent voices, who plead with her to return to them. For good or evil, multitudes of tongues cry to her, "Return, return, O Solyma: return, return."

Will you kindly notice from the connection of my text what state Solyma was in when these calls came to her? She was in her glory and beauty. In admiration the question is asked, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" A church or an individual Christian in a low state of grace may escape observation. Who cares about a dead church? Who fights with a lukewarm people? But if Jesus Christ be in the church, or in the heart, he will soon be seen. The evangelist tells us, "he could not be hid." You may slip down the street in the night without a candle, and like a thief you may pass by unobserved, but if the Lord has lighted your candle, and you bear it with you, the watchmen will notice you, the dogs will bark at you, and others will spy you out. As fire reveals itself, so also will grace. A bundle of lavender proclaims its own whereabouts by its fragrance, and so does the life of God in the soul. You may be sure that if the Lord of Hosts is with you, and in you, you will assuredly arouse the animosity of some, and the admiration of others. I pray that you and I may be in a bright, clear, forcible condition, as the bride was in this part of the Canticle; then shall we be sought after, and enquired about.

It appears that the church in her beauty had gone down to attend to her work. "I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded." She did not sit down in the house to admire herself, nor go into the street to show herself: she went down into her Lord's garden to attend to her proper work, and then it was that they cried, "Return, return." Neither the world nor Christ himself will call much after us if we go forth to make displays of our own excellences. "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts," is a wretched piece of self-consciousness, which disgusts more than it attracts. A diligent life is an attractive life. Do thou, like an ant, work in thy season, carrying

thy due burden upon the ant-hill, and if thou doest this for love of Jesus thou doest nobly. Plod on without courting approbation, and rest content to do thine utmost for the common weal. In fellowship with thy Lord humbly do thy day's work in thy day. Seek not great things for thyself. Ask not to rule in the court, but be willing to work in the field; seek not to recline on the couch, but take thy pruning-knife, and go forth among the vines, to fulfil thine office, and in that self-forgetting service thy beauty shall be manifested, and voices shall salute thee, crying, "Return, return."

It appears, too, that while she was thus engaged, she was the subject of a great stir and emotion of heart. Perhaps she had felt dull and dreary till she entered on her work, but while she was busy with her pomegranates and her nuts, she cries, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." She felt that she could hasten like the chariots of a willing people, who rush to the fight from love of their prince. She felt as if she could run after her Beloved; she could leap, she could fly. Like a chariot that is drawn by Pharaoh's swiftest coursers, her spirit left all behind. Thus vigorous and active, she was watched by many eyes, and soon she heard voices coming from the four quarters of the universe, crying, "Return, return, O Shulamith; return, return." I would, dear friends, that all Christians were what they should be. I am told, but I would not judge, that large numbers of professing people are only half alive, and are altogether asleep. If it be so, I wonder not that they are so inconsiderable in their influence. If they are neither diligent in their Master's business, nor fervent in spirit towards him, they are justly despised by those about them. If it be so with you, my brethren, you are losing the joy of Christian life when you might be filled with delight; you are poverty-stricken, where you might be rich; you are as beggars in the city where you are entitled to take up an honourable burgess-ship. May the Lord revive you! May he forgive your coldness, and set your souls on fire with love to Jesus! If you have life, may you now have it more abundantly! Doth not your Master desire that the feeblest of you may be as David, and David as the angel of the Lord?

I speak to you who are the beloved of the Lord, to you who labour in holy service, to you who are quickened with a high degree of spiritual life, and feel your souls within you stirred with sacred enthusiasm. You are worth addressing: may the Holy Spirit make my address worthy of your attention! Let us use our text in two ways; may each one be profitable!

First, *she hears the lower voices that cry, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return,"* and she answers them with most conclusive negatives. Read the text another way, and in the second place, *she hears voices from above, which cry, "Return, return, O Solyma: return, return,"* and she answers them by her actions as well as by her words.

I. Let us listen for a minute or two, but only with our ears, not with our hearts, to THE LOWER VOICES. *Whence come these voices?* There are voices from the vasty deep of sin and hell, voices from the tombs which we have quitted, voices from the Egypt from which we have fled. They are crying evermore, like unquiet ghosts, "Return, return." Especially do they call to young souls, who are newly wedded to Jesus,

in the hope that they have not as yet forgotten their own kindred and their father's house. When we have gone a long way in the divine life, the world feels dubious of our return, and almost gives us up, preferring rather to accuse than to invite. After many years of faithful service, and of resolute nonconformity to the world, many temptations which assaulted our youth are unknown to our maturity. The devil is not altogether a fool, although he is great in that direction; and therefore he does not continue for ever to use nets which have failed to entangle the birds. If he finds that cajolery will not ensnare us, he leaves his old tactics and tries other methods. When "Return, return" will not woo us, he puts on his lion form, and roars till the mountains shake. Upon young believers he very commonly uses very powerful inducements to go back. In the hope that he is dealing with Mr. Pliable, he exhibits the hardness of godliness and the pleasantness of sin, and draws the moral that they had better retrace their steps. To them he calls as sweetly as his cruel voice can tone itself, "Return, return, O Shulamith: return, return."

By *old companions* he does this. They say, "You have left us all, we do not know why. You have turned a fanatic; you have joined with gloomy Christian people, and you are not half the good fellow you used to be. Are you not getting a little tired of those dreary ways? Are not the rules of Christ too precise and Puritanic? Are not the ways of God too self-denying? Is not godliness too holy and too heavenly for poor fallible beings like ourselves? If so, the door is open: we will welcome you back. It is true you rent yourself away and said that you must needs go on pilgrimage to the Celestial City, but we will not throw this in your teeth if you will give up such nonsense. Come, be a good fellow with us once more. We have not drunk up all the wine, nor broken all the viols. We are care-for-nothings still, and we shall be glad to make you as light-hearted as ourselves. You were a jolly fellow before you took those blues, and turned so squeamish: Come, shake it off, and be yourself again." How winningly they put it! How cleverly they mimic the tones of true friendship! One would think they sought our good, and were anxious to be our guardian angels.

Sometimes the desires of nature come to their help, and the tender passion is enlisted on the side of evil. Bright eyes and gentle lips speak to the natural heart, and plead with it to return. The tender love of women has thus played the tempter, and so has the strong affection of men. Courtesy and amiability cry, "Why do you fight so shy of us? You know what happy times we used to have together. Come, you have tried these Christian people and their faith; you must have found it very moping and melancholy: return and be merry once more. See how much more free we are than they; do not live by rule and order; return to the liberty of sin." Thus do her former comrades cry, "Return, return, O Solyma."

The *old joys* sometimes, in moments of weakness which will come upon us, revive upon the memory, and attempt to mislead us. I have known the young Christian remember what he once thought were joys, and though he has clean left them, and hates them, yet in the distance which lends enchantment he does not notice so much of their shallowness, baseness, and brevity, and he thinks to himself, "In those days I

laughed away the hours right merrily; life was light as a feather; in its froth and foam I saw rainbows of delight. Shall I try these things again? Was I not too hasty in renouncing them?" All the while the voices cry enchantingly, like the songs of the Sirens, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return." They bring out their most melodious music, and omit all discordant passages from the sonnet of life. They would have us hark back to what was once our joy. Oh, brothers, 'tis a wretched temptation, and yet some fall before it.

Do you not know how the world will even call us back to our *old cares?* We used to fret and worry until by God's grace we were led to try walking by faith, and then the Lord helped us to rest in his love, and wait patiently for him, and now perhaps for years we have had no burdens, for we have cast them on the Lord: we have gone in the morning, and told him the fears of the day, and at night we have had little else to do but to bless him for the mercy which has averted all those fears. We have lived in sweet content, rich in joyful expectation, and not poor even in present felicity; and now perhaps the world says, "You have spent too much of your money on religion; why did you not save it? You wasted a mint of your time upon furthering a kingdom which is imaginary. Oh, if you had given up those energies to the world, and stuck to your business, how much richer you might have been! Come now, quit those dreams, shun those prayer-meetings, leave that tiresome office in the Sunday-school, give up philanthropic speculations, and follow after your personal interests, like a sensible man, you may get on then; if you mind the main chance you may rise in the social scale." There are times when steady, sober people, for whom the temptations of gaiety and vice have no charm at all, stand spell-bound by these more solid but equally degrading offers. Madame Bubble, as you know, offereth to the pilgrim her person, and there are many who turn with loathing from so vile a proffer; but then she also offereth her purse, and there are men like Mr. Standfast, who are as poor as an owlet, to whom that offer comes with dangerous force. Her voice has a shrill metallic ring, as she cries, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return. Return from generosity to selfishness, from holy zeal to worldliness and prudence. Seek that which all the nations of the world seek after, that which thou canst see with thine eyes, and enjoy with thy mouth." Many are these calls: I need not go into details, you will hear them soon enough. The Sirens are a numerous and ensnaring sisterhood.

When do these voices come? Their sound is heard full often. "Return, return, return, return,"—four times over the text hath it. They come so often that the word in the epistle to the Hebrews is more than justified, "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." These opportunities come in our way everywhere, and at all times. If you wish to leave off being a Christian, if you wish to follow the world in its pleasures or in its labours, the doors are always open. It is a wonderfully forgiving world if you will but quit your protest against it. If we run away from our old master, and wish to return to his service, his yoke is always ready for our neck; he will never deny us employment, even though it be to feed swine. Only too glad is the

devil to pardon runaways. He is not ashamed to return with seven others to the house which he aforetime quitted. Often, often the child of God in his early days hears the entreaties of destroyers, as with all subtlety they plead, "Return, return, O Bride of Solomon; return, return."

At times these voices come from quarters to which our hearts lie open. Many a man hath been wooed from the ways of holiness by her that lay in his bosom. Samson had his Delilah. Oftener still, the professing Christian woman has been solicited to forsake her Lord by him who should have helped her in her noblest aspirations. Children have been misled by parents, friends by friends; for Satan hath many servitors, and many who do his bidding almost unwittingly. It is a fight to reach to heaven, and few there be to help us in it; but the path to hell is downward, and multitudes thrust out their hands to urge us to the infernal deeps. These cries are borne to us by every gale, in tones both loud and gentle, "Return, return."

And, dear brethren, we shall find that they solicit us in our best moments. I cannot fully account for the fact, but so it is, that I am most liable to speak unadvisedly with my lips when I have just enjoyed the raptures of high fellowship with God. Yonder shines the Mountain of Transfiguration in its unrivalled splendour; but lo, at the very foot of it the devil rages in the lunatic child! Our highest graces are not to be trusted, for, as the most venomous serpents lurk among the brightest flowers, so are temptations most abundant hard by our most spiritual and heavenly joys. Trust not thyself, O child of God, when thou hast seen the invisible, when thou hast stood within the circle of fire, and spoken with God as only his favourites may! Think not thyself secure when thou comest down into thy worldly business, though thou hast bathed thy forehead in the serene light of communion. As pirates distinctly aim to attack the most heavily-laden galleons, so will Satan assail thee when thy vessel has just left the Gold Coast of meditation and prayer. Therefore, watch thou, and pray evermore. That detestable voice, which dared to ask the Master himself to fall down and worship Satan, will come to thee when thou art most bright and shining with the glory of hallowed fellowship, and it will whisper to thee, "Return, return. Come down from the mount, and break the commandments to shivers at its foot." The fiend will call thee Solyma, quoting thy heavenly name—that name of peace and love—and yet he will dare to say, "Return, return." He will flatter us for our virtues, and yet tempt us to the worst of vices. Get thee behind me, Satan. Avaunt, foul fiend! Even when repulsed he will return to the charge, crouch at our feet, and whine out still, "Return, return." The treasures of Egypt, and the pleasures of sin, are his bait and bribe. We cannot and will not return at his bidding, yet his frequent solicitation puts us to a stand, and makes us cry for help.

Notice that our text goes on to say *why they wish us to return.* "Return, return, that we may look upon thee." And is that all? Am I to be a traitor to my Lord, and quit his holy ways, and forfeit heaven, to be made a show of by thee, O Satan? or by thee, O world? Is this a full reward for treachery—"that we may look upon thee?" Why, their looks are daggers. As the eyes of basilisks are the eyes of the ungodly world; as malignant stars that blast the soul. Whenever you

long for ungodly men to see your piety, your piety will wither beneath their glance. Remember how that expression of looking upon Zion is sometimes used in Scripture; in Micah iv. 11 we have it—"Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion." They wished to spy out her sorrows and weaknesses, that they might jest at her, and grieve her: these enemies will do the same with you if you give them the opportunity. Trust a wolf at your throat sooner than worldly men in religious matters. They cannot mean you good, nor do you good should they mean it. They will draw you out and then expose you, they will entice you into sin and then report your faults. When the world loves the holy man it is the love of the vulture for the sick lamb. Fear you the worldling, even when he bears you gifts.

Now hear *Solyma's wise answer to her tempters.* She says, "What will ye see in Solyma?" Dost thou ask me, O world, to come back and show myself to be thy friend? Dost thou promise me approbation? Dost thou vow to look upon me, and admire me, and take me for an example? What is there in me that thou canst approve of? What wilt thou see in Solyma? What can the world see in a believer? The world knoweth us not, because it knew Christ not. A blind man wants to see me: I need not go far to oblige him, for he will get but little out of it if I yield to his request. What a vain reason,—"That we may look upon thee"! They are so blind they cannot even see themselves, nor know that they are blind. What have you and I to do with them? No, let us walk in the light, and have fellowship with God, and then our life shall be hid with Christ in God, only to be manifested when our Lord is manifested; and we shall be well content to have it so. Listen, O blind world, while we tell you what you would see if we did come to you. "What will ye see in Solyma?" You would see—we grieve to say it—a conflict within us: "As it were the company of two armies." You would see two things in us; and yet neither would give you satisfaction. There is sin in us; but inasmuch as it grieves us to have it there we will not show it you. We do not wish to make mirth for the daughter of Babylon, and when her children ask us to make music for them by singing one of the songs of Zion, we answer, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" If we must tell you what you would see in us, we will confess our faultiness, but warn you that out of this you would get but little joy. You would see two armies, it is true, but neither of them would yield to you. You would see in us a nature like your own; but it is mortified, kept under, and laid under condemnation. It would give you no great pleasure to see it, for we reckon it to be dead. The dead are poor company. There is in us, it is true, a capacity for all your worldly joys; but the world is crucified to us, and we are crucified unto the world. There is in us a capacity for all your merriment, but if we were forced to be with you we should be dreadful kill-joys to you; you would wonder that we did not laugh when you laugh at sin, and that we should not be as ready as you are to run into excess of riot. We should soon weary you, for the Lord has said, "I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people." You would say by and by, "Let these slow souls begone: they hinder our mirth." If we came among you as we are, it would happen with us ere long as it

did with Israel, for "Egypt was glad when they departed." Our nature that is like your nature is put under restraint, and dies daily, and its expiring groans would be sorry music in your ears.

Then, do you know we have another army in us? That is, there is a new life in us; that life is the indwelling Spirit of God, as it is written, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them." If we did return at your request, if we came in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ, with the Holy Spirit indwelling our bodies, and making them his temples, you would not know what to make of us, and consequently you would scoff at us, as Ishmael did at Isaac, or envy us as his brethren envied Joseph. You would be sure to ridicule us, for you would not understand us, and therefore you would count us hypocrites and sanctimonious fools. As well might oxen commune with men as the wicked with the godly. We have a life beyond you and above you, into which you cannot enter. We are sorry for you that you will not receive the heavenly life which is in Christ Jesus, but as you have it not, we cannot make you our confidants or associates. You would grieve us, and we should provoke you; and therefore we are best apart. You say, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return, that we may look upon thee," and our only answer must be, "What would ye see in Solyma?" Nothing but that which would rebuke and anger you: you would see a company of two armies, both fighting against you.

Come, young brothers and sisters, you that have been tempted to go back; you cannot even tolerate the thought. You have burned your boats behind you, and must conquer or die. Like one of old, you say, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back." To go back were to give the lie to the word of God, to make God himself false, to tell the worldling that there are, after all, no pleasures in Christ like the pleasures of the world; it would be to spit in your Saviour's face, to play the Judas, to sell Christ for pieces of money, or for the filthy lusts of this present evil world. Go back! It were to renounce heaven and all its glories; it were to choose a terrible death-bed, with a guilty conscience ringing the knell of your soul; it were to choose eternal banishment from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power. You cannot return; you cannot even look back. If thou art a true Shulamith, thou wilt not even deliberate for a moment about it, but flinging thyself into the Beloved's arms, thou wilt cry, "Lord, to whom should I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." God help you so to do, for Jesus' sake. That is the first part of our subject.

II. Now we turn to listen, not with our ears only, but with our hearts too, to the call of THE HIGHER VOICES which cry, "Return, return." Brethren, to go to heaven, to go to Christ, to go towards holiness, is a return to God's people: for God's people are originally his children. Though they are prodigals, and have gone into a far country, they always were his children; even when they spent their substance in riotous living they were still his sons, and each of them could speak of "My Father's house." To come to Christ, and holiness, and heaven, is to return. Besides, all God's people have a new life put into them. Whence came that new life but from heaven and God? Therefore to go towards God is for the quickened ones to return. All God's people are bound for heaven; it is in their charter-party that they

should sail for heaven, and therefore to heaven they must go. When the Israelites came out of Egypt to go to Canaan they were not going to a strange land, they were returning to what had always been their inheritance according to the covenant; they were going out of the house of bondage, and they were returning to the land that flowed with milk and honey, where their fathers had sojourned before them. Now, to-day, as a child of God, I can hear voices out of the yet beyond, ringing out of the glory, and crying to me, "Return, return." My Father is in heaven; my Saviour is on the throne; many brethren have gone before; all my heart is with my treasure, therefore I hear the shining ones crying to me every day, "Return, return, O Solyma; return return!" Every harp in the heavenly choir is ringing out an invitation to all the Lord's beloved; every palm-bearing hand is beckoning to us; every glorified lip is calling us to come up higher.

To return, I think, means this,—come nearer to Christ, nearer to God, nearer to holiness. You are saved; seek to be like your Saviour. You did enjoy splendid days at first, in the love of your espousals; return to them; walk always in the light as God is in the light. You were once in the banqueting-house, and the banner over you was love: return to that house of fellowship. Every day seek to lose yourself more in Christ, to live more completely in him, by him, for him, with him. Return, return, to greater heights of holiness, to deeper self-denial, to braver service, to intenser love, to more burning zeal, to more of the Godlike and the Christlike. Return, return. The holiest and the best call us that way. Every saint in heaven cries, "Return"; every child of God on earth who is full of the inner life entreats us to return; and chiefly, that dear voice, which once for us cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is always calling to us, "Return, return." Oh, how sweetly doth he use the name himself did give us, our marriage name! Hear him beseech us, "O Solyma, my best beloved, return, return, and come to me!" These are the higher voices.

Notice that in the text that word "return" is put four times over. Is it not because it is of the highest importance that every child of God should keep returning, and coming nearer to the Father's house? Is it not because it is our highest joy, our strongest security, our best enrichment, to be always coming to Christ as unto a living stone, and getting into closer fellowship with him? As he calls four times, is it not a hint that we are slow to come? We ought to come to Jesus not only at his first call, but even at the glances of his eyes, when he looks as though he longed for our love: it ought to be our rapture to think only of him, and live wholly to him; but as we fail to answer to first pleas, he cries four times, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return. Come to thine own Husband, thine own loving Lord." He ceases not to entreat until we do return. Do not the reduplications of this call hint at his strong desire after us, his condescending love for us? It does seem so wonderful to me that Christ should want our fellowship, but he does: he cannot be happy without us. Still he sitteth down upon the well when he is thirsty, and looking across to Samaria's fallen daughter he says to her, "Give me to drink." His people are his fulness; he cannot be filled if they are away: I dared not have said this if the Holy Ghost had not declared it, but it is true. Without his people Jesus would be a Head

without a body, and that is a ghastly object; a King without subjects, and that would have been a wretched parody of royalty; a Shepherd without sheep, and that would have been a dolorous office, having many pains but no reward. Jesus must have us, or he is a Bridegroom without a bride, bereaven and barren. Oh, how he loves us! How he longs for communion with us! Shall he stand and cry, "Return, return," and will we not come to him at once? Hear him again in another way. He knocks at our door and he cries, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Will we not admit him? If he seeks our company, and therefore calls us to return, our spirit bursts her fetters, she is ashamed of the bonds that hold her on the right and on the left. She cries "Let me go; I must be with my Lord; his voice compels me. My soul would leap out of the body rather than not come at him who cries, 'Return, return, return, return.'"

I have shown you why the call is so oft repeated. Do you not think it is a very instructive call? Permit me to put it thus: "Return," that is, to your first simple faith. If you have risen to greatness of conceit and pride of knowledge, return to your humble thoughts. Shrink to nothing again in the presence of your God. Come to the cross as you came at first, saying,—

> "I the chief of sinners am,
> But Jesus died for me."

Return to your first loving intercourse with Christ, for then the days were only bright with his presence, and the night watches were not weary while you could commune with him. Return to the happy love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after him into the wilderness, for those were halcyon days. Return, return, to your first ardour in service. Nothing was too hot, or too heavy for you then; you were impetuous to be engaged in seeking his redeemed. You have grown lazy now, and you think service for God too severe a strain upon you. Return to your first diligence in joyous service. Return also to your eagerness for holy growth. Then you desired to have the best that God could give you: in those days you resolved to be a thorough Christian; not barely to live, but to live unto God in the highest degree. Return unto that, and aspire after more. If you have left the best form of consecration, return to it. Oh, sea, rise once more to high-water mark, if thou hast turned to ebb! Oh, soul, come back to the highest thou hast ever attained or longed for! As the eagle cries, "higher"; as the river crieth, "fuller"; as the day crieth, "brighter"; so let it be with thee. Thou art married to him whose blood has bought thee, and he cannot, will not be in heaven without thee; therefore, hasten to obey while he saith to thee, "Return, return!"

I beg you to observe what the spouse has to say to this when she is thus called upon to return to the Lord. The Lord saith to her, "Return, return, that we may look upon thee." Is not that a reason for coming back? The Lord says, "That I may look upon thee." He desires your society, and seems gently to hint that you have kept aloof from him. He seems to say,—"You have not been much with me alone lately, you have neglected the reading of the word, and the hearing of it; I have

scarcely seen thy face; therefore return, that I may look upon thee." Cover your face and say, "Lord, why shouldst thou look on me? I am full of sin"; but then draw near to him, that his look of love may bring thee to repentance, and cause thy sin to pass away. Remember he hath power in his eyes to look thee into purity and beauty. Come and say, "Look upon me, Lord; search me, try me, and know my ways." Return, that with infinite pity thy Beloved may see what aileth thee, and then with his dear pierced hand may perform a divine surgery upon thee, and make thee well again.

"Return, that we may look upon thee." I think I may use the phrase to express also that intense satisfaction which Jesus has in every believer. With what pleasure the mother looks upon her child: she remembereth no more the travail for joy that a man is born into the world; but with infinitely greater satisfaction doth Christ see of the travail of his soul in every believer. You ought to show yourselves to Jesus, you have cost him so much: he has loved you even to the death, and loves you still, you ought to abide with him. Return to him that he may look upon you.

And I think, too, when we live near to him, and get into fellowship with him, Jesus feels a sweet complacency towards us. O dear parents, you know the pleasure you have in your loving children; if they have been away from you for years, what a satisfaction it is again to see them within your doors; there is no sight like it! Your Lord loves you so much that it gives him profound pleasure, it swells his heaven to the brim to see you living in his love. What must be his grief when you go fussing about the world, and have no time to talk with him; when you go out sporting and mixing with his enemies, and say that you have no leisure to commune with him! You give delight to him who is Immanuel, God with us, when you frequently approach him, or constantly abide with him. You make him glad with your secret devotion, your heart's affection, your holy boldness, your all-absorbing zeal. Oh, do come to your Lord that he may look upon you!

Did I hear you bashfully say, "What will ye see in Solyma? If Jesus looks on such a dead dog as I am, what will he see in me? I am so full of evil." He will see in you that which delights him. He will see his own work there; yea, he will see himself there. Did you never see the sun reflected in a little splinter of glass? The mirror was scarcely an inch in diameter, yet you saw the heavens in it. Have you never looked upon a bubble blown by a school-boy's pipe, and seen a thousand rainbows in it? When the Lord looks on his people, he sees the reflection of himself: he can see himself in our eyes, and therefore those eyes charm him so that he cries, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." The infinite love there is between Christ and us makes him see no sin in Jacob, neither iniquity in Israel; but he looks until he exclaims, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." Be not ashamed to return to your Lord, for he lovingly urges thee to do so. Let your heart and your flesh, like two armies, welcome him, let all your inward conflict aim at coming nearer to him. Rest not till, like Jacob's two bands, you are altogether under the blessing of the covenant angel.

I will turn my text about a little, and give you another rendering, which will suit the heart which is welcoming its Lord. Our Mahanaim, our meeting of hosts, shall not be for war, now that the Lord invites us like Jacob to return to the land of milk and honey; but the companies shall be as musical as they are martial. There are within our experiences companies of singing soldiers, choirs of camps. The text exhibits the warring soul, triumphant in her Lord, and meeting him with timbrel and harp.

"Spouse of Christ, in arms contending,
Though thy battle-course must run;
Yet with prayers for help ascending,
Shout thy praise for triumphs won."

Oh, if my Lord will come and meet me, he shall see in me whole choirs of songsters! My heart, like Miriam, shall take a timbrel, and all my powers, like the daughters of Israel, shall follow, dancing and singing with glad accord. On the high-sounding cymbals my heart shall play, singing,—"His own right hand and his holy arm have gotten him the victory. Glory! Glory! Where he cometh glory dwelleth." When shall I come into his presence, and behold my God, my exceeding joy? Then will I praise him with body and soul, with heart and with voice. His coming with all his perfections, and my coming with all my desires, shall make a Mahanaim; and the two hosts, once met, shall encamp together, guarding the King's pavilion, which glitters in the midst. Then shall the warriors become minstrels, and the soldiers shall be singers, as in the valley of Berachah, where all the people triumphed, and they returned to Jerusalem playing upon harps, and psalteries, and trumpets.

Here I leave you in the joyful presence of the King. We cannot cease speaking at a higher point. The Lord keep us in his presence, for his love's sake. Amen

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xxi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—917, 779, 853.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

PLEADING AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 17TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?"—Ezekiel xviii. 23.

"For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye."—Ezekiel xviii. 32.

"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"—Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

SIN having a thorough possession of the human heart, entrenches itself within the soul, as one who has taken a stronghold speedily attends to the repairing of the breaches, and the strengthening of the walls, lest haply he should be dislodged. Among the most subtle devices of sin to keep the soul under its power, and prevent the man's turning to God, is the slandering of the Most High by misrepresenting his character. As dust blinds the eye, so does sin prevent the sinner from seeing God aright. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"; but the wicked only see what they think to be God, and that, alas, is an image as unlike to God as possible! They say, for instance, that God is unmerciful, whereas he delighteth in mercy. The unfaithful servant in the parable was quite sure about it, and said most positively, "I knew that thou wast an austere man:" whereas the nature of God is as opposite to overbearing and exaction as light is from darkness.

When men once get this false idea of God into their minds they become hardened in heart: believing that it is useless to turn to God, they go on in their sins with greater determination. Either they conceive that God is implacable, or that he is indifferent to human prayers, or that if he should hear them yet he is not in the least likely to grant a favourable answer. Men darkly dream that God will not attend to the guilty and the miserable when they cry to him; that their prayers are not good enough for him: that he expects so much from his creatures that they cannot even pray so as to please him; that, in fact, he seeketh a quarrel against us, and is a taskmaster who will grind all he can out of us. Being themselves slow to forgive, they judge it to be highly unlikely that the Lord will pardon such sins as theirs. As they will not smile on the poor or the fallen, they conceive that the Lord will never

receive unworthy ones into his favour. Thus they belie the Most High: they make him who is the best of Kings to be a tyrant; him who is the dearest of friends they regard as an enemy; and him whose very name is love they look upon as the embodiment of hate.

This is one of Satan's most mischievous devices to prevent repentance. As in the old times of plague they fastened up the house-door, and marked a red cross upon it, and thus the inhabitants of that dwelling were sealed unto death, even so the devil writes upon the man's door the words, "*no hope*," and then the sick soul determines to die, and refuses admission to the Physician. No man sins more unreservedly than he who sins in desperation, believing that there is no pardon for him from God. An assault where the watchword is "No quarter" usually provokes a terrible defence. The pirate who is hopeless of pardon becomes reckless in his deeds of blood. Many a burglar in the old time actually went on to murder without remorse, because he thought he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. When a man believes that there is no hope for him in the right way, he determines that he will get what he can out of the wrong way; and if he cannot please God, he will, at least, please himself. If he must go to hell, he will be as merry as he can on the road, and, as he puts it, he will "die game." All this comes of a mistaken view of God. Do you not see the likeness between sin and falsehood? They are twin brothers. Holiness is truth, but sin is a lie, and the mother of lies. Sin brings forth falsehood, and then falsehood nourishes sin. Especially in this fashion doth falsehood maintain sin, by calumniating the God of love. He is a God ready to pardon, and by no means hard to be moved to forgiveness; why do men stand off from confessing their wrong, and finding mercy? He is not a God who taketh pleasure in the miseries of men; why do they think so ill of him? His ear is not dull to the cry of sorrow, his heart is not slow to compassionate distress; on the contrary, he waiteth to be gracious, "his mercy endureth for ever," he delighteth in mercy; why will men run from him? God is love immeasurable, love constant, boundless, endless.

> "Who is a pardoning God like thee?
> Or who hath grace so rich and free?"

Part of our business as ministers of Christ is to bear witness to the loving-kindness of the Lord against the falsehood with which sin dishonours his goodness. I desire to do so this morning, and to do it in right down earnest, in the hope that those of you who are convinced of sin may this day be able to rest in the mercy of God,—even that exceeding mercy which he has revealed in Jesus Christ, his Son.

I have been very much struck with several letters which I have this week received from deeply-wounded souls. God is at work among us with the sword of conviction. I have felt a great degree of joy in receiving these letters; painful as they are to their writers, they are very hopeful to me. I am sorry that any persons should be near despair, and should continue in that condition; but anything is better than indifference. I am not sorry to see souls shut up in the prison of the law, for I hope they will soon come out of the prison-house into the full liberty of faith in Christ. I must confess my preference for these old-fashioned

forms of conviction: it is my judgment that they produce better and more stable believers than the modern superficial methods. I am glad to see the Holy Spirit overturning, throwing down, digging out the foundations, and making you like cleared ground, that he may build upon you temples for his praise. How earnestly do I pray that the Lord may make of these convinced ones champions for the doctrines of free grace, comforters for his mourners, and consecrated servants of his kingdom! I look for large harvests from this deep subsoil ploughing. The Lord grant it, for his name's sake!

I can see in several who have written to me that their main idea is erroneous; that they have fallen into a wrong notion about God: they do not conceive of him as the good and gracious God which he really is. This error I am eager to correct. Listen to me, ye mourners. I desire to tell you nothing but sober truth. God forbid that I should misrepresent God for your comfort! Job asked his friends, "Will ye talk deceitfully for God?" and my answer to that question is,—"Never." I would not utter what I believed to be falsehood concerning the Lord, even though the evil one offered me the bait of saving all mankind thereby. I have noticed in certain Revival Meetings a wretched lowering of the truth upon many points in order to afford encouragement to men; but all such sophistry ends in utter failure. Comfort based upon the suppression of truth is worse than useless. Lasting consolation must come to sinners from the sure truth of God; or else in the day when they most want it their hopes will depart from them, as the giving up of the ghost. I will therefore speak to you the truth in its simplicity concerning the blessed God, whose servant I am. I beseech you no longer to persevere in your slander of his infinite love. Oh, you that feel your sin, and dare not put your trust in your forgiving God, I pray you to learn of him, and know him aright, for then shall that text be fulfilled in you,—"They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." May the Holy Spirit come now in all his brightness, that you may see God in his own light! As for me, I feel my duty to be one in which nothing can avail me but that same Spirit. Chrysostom used to wonder that any minister could be saved, seeing our responsibilities are so great; I am entirely of his mind. Pray for me that I may be faithful to men's souls.

Notice, that in each one of my texts the Lord declares that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but in each following passage the statement is stronger. The Lord puts it first as a matter of *question*. As if he were surprised that such a thing should be laid to his door, he appeals to man's own reason, and asks, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" Oh, souls, can you really think that God desires your damnation? Can you be so demented as soberly to believe such a calumny? Will such a theory hold water for a single minute? After all the goodness of God to multitudes of rebellious men, can you allow such a dark thought to linger near your mind, that God can have pleasure in men's being sinners, and ultimately destroying themselves by their iniquities? Your own common-sense must teach you that the good God is grieved to see men sin, that he would be glad to see men of a better mind, and that it is sad work to him to punish the finally obstinate and impenitent. He cries most plaintively "Oh,

do not this abominable thing that I hate." He puts it here as a question of wonderment, that men should so grossly malign him as to think that the God of love could have any pleasure in men's perishing by their sins.

But then, in the next place, in our second text, God makes *a positive assertion*. Knowing the human heart, he foresaw that a question would not be enough to end this matter, for man would say, "He only asked the question, but he did not give a plain and positive statement to the contrary." He gives us that clear assurance in our second text: "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." When the Lord speaks he is to be believed, for he is God that cannot lie. We know that this speech of his is authentic; it comes to us by an inspired prophet, concerning whose call by God we entertain no doubt whatever. Let us, then, believe it heartily. If I were to state this as my own opinion, you might do as you pleased about believing it; but since God saith this, then we claim of you all, as God's creatures, that you believe your Creator, and that this statement be never questioned again. "Where the word of a king is, there is power,"—power, I trust, to silence all further debate upon the willingness of God to save.

But still, as if to end for ever the strange and ghastly supposition that God takes delight in human destruction, my third text seals the truth with the *solemn oath* of the Eternal. He lifts his hand to heaven, and swears; and because he can swear by no greater he swears by himself,—not by his temple, nor by his throne therein, nor by his angels, nor by anything outside of himself; but he sweareth by his own life. Jehovah that liveth for ever and ever saith, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." The man who dares to doubt the oath of God will be guilty of an arrogant presumption which I would not like to impute to one of you. Shall God be perjured? I tremble at having even suggested such a thing; and yet if you do not believe the Lord's own oath you will not only have made him a liar, but you will have denied the value of his oath when he swears by his own life. What he thus affirms must be true; let us bow before it, and never entertain a doubt about it. Most miserable of all men that breathe must they be who will dare to attack the veracity of God, when God to confirm their confidence doth put himself upon an oath. Let us hear the voice of the Lord in its majesty, like a peal of distant thunder,—"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

I invite your earnest consideration of this utterance thus given in the form of a question, an assertion, and a solemn oath.

I. And I notice, first, the assertion that GOD FINDS NO PLEASURE IN A SINNER'S DEATH. Really I feel ashamed to have to answer the cruel libel which is here suggested; yet it is the English of many a man's doubts. He dares not come to God and trust him because he darkly dreams that God is a terrible Being who does not wish to save him, who is unwilling to forgive him, unwilling to receive him into his favour. He suspects that God finds some kind of terrible delight in a soul's damnation. That cannot be. I need not disprove the falsehood. God swears to the con-

trary, and the falsehood vanishes like smoke. I will only bring forward certain evidence by which you who are still under the deadly influence of the falsehood may be delivered.

First, *consider the great paucity of God's judgments among the sons of men.* There are people who are always talking of judgments, but they are in error. If a theatre is burnt down, or if a boat is upset on the Sabbath, they cry "Behold a judgment!" Yet churches and meeting-houses are burned, and missionaries are drowned when upon the Lord's own business. It is wrong to set down everything that happens as a judgment, for in so doing you will fall into the error of Job's friends, and condemn the innocent. The fact is there are but few acts of divine providence to individuals which can definitely be declared to be judgments. There are such things, but they are wonderfully rare in this life, considering the way in which the Lord is daily provoked by presumption and blasphemy. It was a judgment when Pharaoh's hosts were drowned in the Red Sea; that was a judgment when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram went down alive into the pit. There were judgments later on in the church of God when Ananias and Sapphira fell dead for lying against the Holy Ghost, and when Elymas the sorcerer was blinded for opposing Paul. Still, these are few; and in later days the authentic instances are equally rare. Does not the Lord himself say that "judgment is his strange work"? Among his own people there is a constant judgment of fatherly discipline, but the outer world is left to the gentle *régime* of mercy. This is the age of patience and long-suffering. If God had taken any pleasure in the death of the wicked, some of you who are now present would long ago have gone down to hell; but he hath not dealt with you after your sins, nor rewarded you according to your iniquities. If God were constantly dealing out judgment for lying, how many who are now here would by this time have received their portion in the burning lake! If judgments for Sabbath-breaking had been commonly dealt out, this city of London would have been destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. But God reserveth his wrath till the day of wrath; for a while he winketh at man's obstinacy, for this is not the place of judgment, but of forbearance and hope. The fewness of visible deeds of judgment upon ungodly men in this life proves that God takes no delight in them.

And then, secondly, *the length of God's long-suffering before the Day of Judgment itself comes* proves how he wills not the death of men. The Lord spares many guilty men throughout three-score years and ten, bearing with their ill-manners in a way which ought to excite our loving gratitude. Youthful folly is succeeded by manhood's deliberate fault, and that, by the persistence of mature years, and yet the Lord remains patient! Some of you have rejected Christ after having heard the gospel for many years; you have stifled your conscience when it has cried against you, and you have done despite to the Spirit of God. You have rebelled against the light, and have committed greater and yet greater sin, but God has not cut you down. If he had found pleasure in your death, would he have suffered you to live so long? You have cumbered the ground, not two or three years, as the barren fig-tree did, but two or three scores of years you have stood fruitless in the vineyard of God; and yet he spares you! Some have gone beyond all this,

for they have provoked God by their open unbelief, and by their abominable speeches against himself, his Son, and his people. They have tried to thrust their finger into the eye of God; they have spit in the face of the Well-beloved, and persecuted him in the person of his people. Yet the Lord has not killed them out of hand, as he might justly have done. Have you not heard his sword stirring in its scabbard? It would have leaped forth from its sheath if mercy had not thrust it back, and pleaded, "O thou sword of the Lord, rest and be quiet!" It is only because his compassions fail not that you are favoured with the loving invitations of the gospel. Only because of his infinite patience doth grace still wrestle with human sin and unbelief. Let us each one cry—

"Lord, and am I yet alive,
Not in torments, not in hell!
Still doth thy good Spirit strive—
With the chief of sinners dwell?
Tell it unto sinners, tell,
I am, I am out of hell!"

Furthermore, remember *the perfection of the character of God as the moral Ruler of the Universe.* He is the Judge of all, and he must do right. Now, if a judge upon the bench were known to take delight in the punishment of offenders, he ought to be removed at once, for it would be clear that he was thoroughly unfit for his office. A man who would take pleasure in hanging, or imprisoning, would be of the foul breed of Judge Jeffreys, and other monsters, from whom I trust our bench is for ever purged. But if I heard it said that a judge never pronounced the sentence of death without tears, that when he came home from the court, and remembered that some had been banished for life by the sentences which he had been bound to deliver, he sat in a moody, unhappy state all the evening, I should say, "Yes, that is the kind of person to be a judge." Aversion to punishment is necessary to justice in a judge. Such an one is God, who taketh no pleasure either in sin, or in the punishment which is the consequence of sin; he hates both sin and its consequence, and only comes at last to heavy blows with men when everything else has failed. When the sinner must be condemned, or else the foundations of society would be out of course, then he delivers the terrible sentence, but even then it is with unfeigned reluctance, and he cries, "How can I give thee up?" The Great Judge of all seems to descend from the glory of his judgment-seat, and show his more familiar face to you in the text, as in effect he cries, "I have judged, and I have condemned, and I have punished; but, as I live, I find no pleasure in all this, my pleasure comes when men turn unto me and live."

If any further thoughts were necessary to correct your misbelief, I would mention *the graciousness of his work in saving those who turn from their evil ways.* The care which the Most High has taken to produce repentance, the alacrity with which he accepts it, and the abounding love manifested to returning prodigals, are all evidences indisputable that God finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in their salvation. To prevent the death of the wicked the Lord devised a plan of salvation before all worlds; and those who accept that plan find that the Lord has provided for them a Substitute in the person of his own dear Son,

who is indeed his own self; and that in his person God himself has borne the penalty due to sin, that thus the law might be solemnly honoured, and the divine justice vindicated. The Lord has gone up to the tree, and bled his life away thereon, that God might be just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus: does not this prove his delight in salvation? The Holy Spirit comes on purpose to renew the heart, and take the stone away from it, that men may become tender and penitent—does not this show that God delights to save? The whole resources of the Godhead go forth with spontaneous delight for the salvation of those who turn from their sin; yea, they go forth before men turn, to turn them that they may be turned. God is even found of them that sought him not, and he sends his grace to those who cried not after it. As if God were indignant that such a charge should be laid against him that he delighteth in the death of any, he preferred to die himself upon the tree rather than let a world of sinners sink to hell. To prove the desire of God that men should live, his Son abode for thirty years and more on this poor earth as a man among men, and his Holy Spirit has dwelt in men for all these centuries, bearing all the provocations of an erring and ungrateful people. God has proved himself in multitudes of ways to be not the Destroyer, but the Preserver of men. "He that is our God is the God of salvation." "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord."

Thus would I try to vindicate the ways of God to men. When men are to be tried for their lives, if their friends are able to do so, they come to them in prison, and say, "It is a very hopeful thing for you that it is not Judge So-and-So, who is terribly severe; you are to be tried before the kindest man on the bench." Many a prisoner has plucked up courage at such news; and oh, poor sinner, you who dare not trust God, let me chide you into hope by reminding you that Love sits embodied on the throne of judgment this day; and that he who must and will condemn you, if you turn not from your sins, nevertheless will find no pleasure in that condemnation, but will be loth to make bare the axe of execution. Will you not turn to him and live? Do not his compassions beckon you to make a full surrender, and find grace in his sight?

II. But now, secondly, GOD FINDS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT THAT MEN MUST TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS, OR DIE. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." It is one or the other: turn or burn. God, with all his love to men, cannot discover any third course: men cannot keep their sins and yet be saved. The sin must die or the sinner must die.

Be it known to you, first, that when God proclaims mercy to men upon this condition, that they turn from their ways, *this proclamation is issued out of pure grace.* As a matter of bare right, repentance does not bring mercy with it. Does a murderer receive pardon because he regrets his deed? Does a thief escape from prison because at last he comes to be sorry that he was not honest? Repentance makes no available amends for the evil which is done; the evil still remains, and the punishment must be executed. It is of grace, then, that I am permitted to say, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways." It is because at the back of it there is a great sacrifice; it is through an all-sufficient atone-

ment that repentance becomes acceptable. The Son of God has bled and died, and made expiation for sin; and now he is exalted on high, to give repentance and remission of sins. To-day the word of the Lord is, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This is not according to the law, which gives no space for repentance, but it is a pure matter of grace. God saves you, not because of any merit in your turning, but because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he has decreed to save all who turn from the paths of evil.

Note, next, that *if there be no repentance men must be punished, for on any other theory there is an end of moral government.* The worst thing that could happen to a world of men would be for God to say "I retract my law; I will neither reward virtue, nor punish iniquity; do as you like." Then the earth would be a hell indeed. The greatest enemy to civil government among men is the man who preaches universal salvation,—salvation apart from a change of heart and life. Such teachers are a danger to national order, they remove the foundation of the commonwealth. They practically say, "Do just as you like; it may make a slight difference to you for a little while, but it will soon be over, and villains and saints will share an equal heaven." Such talk is damnable! I can say no less. If there is to be a government at all, it is necessary that sin should not go unpunished; leniency to the dishonest is cruelty to those whom they injure. To save the murderer is to kill the innocent. It were an evil day for heaven and earth if it could once be proven that God would reward the depraved in the same way as the sanctified: then would the foundation be removed, and what would the righteous do? A God who was not just would be a poor Ruler of the universe.

Yes, my hearers, sin must be punished; you must turn from it or die, because *sin is its own punishment.* When we talk to you of the fire that never can be quenched, and the worm that dieth not, we are supposed to mean those literal things; but indeed these are figures, figures representing something more terrible than themselves: the fire is the burning of a furious rebellion in the soul, and the worm is the torture of a never-dying conscience. Sin is hell. Within the bowels of disobedience there lieth a world of misery. God has so constituted us, and rightly so, that we cannot long be evil and happy; we must, if we go wrong, ultimately become wretched; and the more wrong we are, and the longer we continue in that wrong, the more assuredly are we heaping up sorrow for ourselves throughout eternity. Holiness and right produce happiness, but iniquity and wrong must, by a necessity of nature which never can be changed, produce tribulation and anguish. It must be so. Even the omnipotence of God cannot make an impenitent sinner happy. You must turn from sin, or turn to misery; you must either renounce your sins, or else renounce all hope of a blissful eternity. You cannot be married to Christ and heaven until you are divorced from sin and self.

I believe that *every man's conscience bears witness to this* if it be at all honest. There are consciences of a very curious kind about at this time—abortions, and not true consciences at all. I find men deliberately

acting upon crooked policy, and yet they talk of truth and holiness. Yet every conscience that is not drunken with the mixed wine of pride and unbelief, will tell a man that when he does evil he cannot expect to be approved; that if he neglects to do good he cannot expect to have the same reward as if he had done the good,—that, in fact, there must be, in the nature of things, a penalty attached to crime. Conscience says as much as that, and now God himself, who taketh no pleasure in the death of the wicked, puts it to you,—you must repent or perish. If you go on in your evil ways, you must be lost. There must be a turning from sin, or the Most High God can never look upon you with favour. Do you hear this? Oh, that you would let it sink into your heart, and work repentance in you!

III. This leads me on to the third point, which is a joyful one: GOD FINDS PLEASURE IN MEN'S TURNING FROM SIN. Read the passage again:—"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Among the highest of the divine joys is the pleasure of seeing a sinner turn from evil. God delights in those first thoughts which men have towards himself, when being careless heretofore they on a sudden begin to reflect upon their ways, and consider their condition before God. He looks with pleasure upon you who have aforetime been wild and thoughtless, who at last meditate upon Eternity, and weigh the future of sin and judgment. When you listen to that inviting word, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," God is pleased to observe your attention. When you begin to feel, "I am sorry for my sin; oh, that I had never committed it!" he hears your sigh. When your heart is sick of sin, when you loathe all evil, and feel that though you cannot get away from it, yet you would if you could, then he looks down on you with pitying eye. When there is a new will springing up in your heart, by his good grace,—a will to obey and believe, then also the Father smiles. When he hears within you a moaning and a sighing after the Father's house and the Father's bosom; you cannot see him, but he is behind the wall listening to you. His hand is secretly putting your tears into his bottle, and his heart is feeling compassion for you. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." Mark that last character: the man has only a little hope, but the Lord taketh pleasure in him. When yet the good work is only in the twilight, God is as pleased with it as watchmen are pleased with the first beams of morning light, ay, he is more glad than they that watch for the morning. When at last you come to prayer, and begin to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," God is well pleased; for here he sees clear signs that you are coming to yourself and to him. His Spirit saith, "Behold, he prayeth!" and he takes this as a token for good. When you unfeignedly forsake sin God sees you do it, and he is so glad that his holy angels spy out his joy.

I am sure that God watches the struggles of those who endeavour to escape from old habits and evil ways. When you try to conquer vile thoughts, when at the end of the day you sit down and cry over the day's failures because you did not get as well through the day as you hoped to do, the Lord observes your desires and your lamentations. Just

as a mother tenderly watches her child when it begins to walk, and smiles as she sees it toddling from chair to chair, and puts out her finger to help it, so doth God take pleasure in your early attempts after holiness, your longings to overcome sin, your sighings and cryings to be delivered from the bondage of corruption. God saith, "I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms," and in the same way he is teaching you.

I will tell you what pleases him most of all, and that is when you come to his dear Son, and say, "Lord, something tells me that there is no hope for me, but I do not believe that voice. I read in thy word that thou wilt cast out none that come unto thee, and lo, I come! I am the biggest sinner that ever did come, but Lord, I believe thy promise; I am as unworthy as the devil himself, but Lord, thou dost not ask for worthiness, but only for childlike confidence. Cast me not away—I rest in thee." "Without faith it is impossible to please God," but it gives God a divine pleasure to see the first grain of mustard seed of faith in a poor, turning sinner's heart. Oh, I wish you would think of this, you that keep on condemning yourselves! When you write me those letters, full of self-condemnation, you please *me;* and if you please me, I am sure you much more please God, who is so much more tender than ever I can be, though I would fain try and humbly imitate him. How I wish I could bring you to trust my Lord this morning, and end those cruel doubts and fears!

> "Artful doubts and reasonings be
> Nailed with Jesus to the tree."

God's great convincing argument is his dying, bleeding Son. Oh, ye chief of sinners, turn to him, and God will have pleasure in your turning! Do you not know that all these thoughts towards him are breathed into you by his Spirit? All those regrets for sin, those desires after holiness, and specially those trustings in Christ, those hopings in his mercy, are all his work: they would never have been found in your soul if the Spirit had not put them there. If I saw a fair flower growing on a dunghill, I should conclude that a gardener had been there some day or other, and had cast seed upon the heap. And when I see your soul commencing to pray, and hope, and trust, I say to myself, "God is there. The Holy Spirit has been at work there, or else there would not have been even that feeble trusting, and that faint hoping." Wherefore, be of good courage, you are drawing near to a gracious God.

During the rest of your life, when you go on fighting with sin, and when you consecrate yourself to Jesus, when you wash your Saviour's feet with your tears, and wipe them with the hairs of your head with the Magdalen, or when you break your alabaster-box of myrrh, and pour it on the Master's head with Mary, the Lord hath great pleasure in you for Jesus' sake. He taketh no pleasure in the groans and cries of hell, but in the repentance of sinners he hath joy. The fires of Gehenna give him no delight, but penitents smiting on their breasts, and believers beholding Christ with tearful eyes, are a royal spectacle to him. It must be so, he swears it, and it must be true. Cease your quibbling, and believe unto eternal life.

IV. Lastly, since he hath pleasure in men's turning to him, God

THEREFORE EXHORTS TO IT, AND ADDS AN ARGUMENT. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" He perceives his poor creature standing with his back to him, looking to idols, looking to sinful pleasures, looking towards the city of destruction, and what does God say to him? He says, "Turn!" It is a very plain direction; is it not? "Turn," or "Right about face!" That is all. "I thought," saith one, "I was to feel so much anguish and so much agony." I should not wonder if you do feel it, but all that God says is, "Turn." You now face the wrong way; "Turn," and face the right way. That turning is true repentance. A changed life is of the essence of repentance; and that must spring from a changed heart, from a changed desire, from a changed will. God saith, "Turn ye." Oh, that you would hear and obey!

Notice how he puts it in the present tense—"Turn ye, turn ye," not to-morrow, but now. Nobody will be saved to-morrow: all who are saved, are saved to-day. "Now is the accepted time." "Turn ye." Oh, by the infinite mercy of God, who will enable you to turn, I do pray you to turn from every evil, from every self-confidence, unto God. No turning but turning to God is worth having. If the Lord turn you, you will turn to himself, and to confidence alone in him, and to his service and his fear.

"Turn ye, turn ye." See, the Lord puts it twice. He must mean your good by these repeated directions. Suppose my man-servant was crossing yonder river, and I saw that he would soon be out of his depth, and so in great danger; suppose I cried out to him, "Stop! stop! If you go another inch you will be drowned. Turn back! Turn back!" Will anybody dare to say, "Mr. Spurgeon would feel pleasure if that man were drowned"? It would be a cruel cut. What a liar the man must be who would hint such a thing when I am urging my servant to turn and save his life! Would God plead with us to escape unless he honestly desired that we should escape? I trow not. Every sinner may be sure that God takes no pleasure in his death when he pleads with him in these unrivalled words, "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die?" There is what the old divines used to call an ingemination, an inward groaning, a reduplication of pleading in these words, "Turn ye, turn ye." He pleads each time with more of emphasis. Will you not hear?

Then he finishes up with asking men to find a reason why they should die. There ought to be a weighty reason to induce a man to die. "Why will ye die?" This is an unanswerable question in reference to death eternal. Is there anything to be desired in eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power? Can there be any gain in losing your own soul? Can there be any profit in going away into everlasting punishment? Can there possibly be anything to be wished for and desired in being cast into hell, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. O souls, be not unreasonable! Do not neglect this great salvation. It must be the most awful thing in all the world to die in your sins; why do you choose it? Do you desire shipwreck? Why hug that rocky shore, and tempt destruction? Will you eat the poisoned dainties of sin because they are sugared with a little present pleasure? In the end, the gall of bitterness will fill your bowels.

I am no flatterer: I dare not be, for I love you, and would persuade you to turn unto the Lord. There is a flower which always turns to the sun; oh, that you would in the same manner turn to God! Why turn away from him? "WHY?" is a little word, but how much it takes to answer its demands! WHY do you continue in sin? WHY do you refuse to believe your Saviour? WHY will you provoke God? WHY will you die? Turn round and say, "Oh, God, I cannot bear to perish everlastingly, and therefore I cannot endure to live in sin. May thy rich grace help me!"

Oh, that you would trust in the Lord Jesus! Repose in him, and in his finished work, and all is well. Did I hear you say, "I will pray about it"? Better trust at once. Pray as much as you like after you have trusted, but what is the good of unbelieving prayers? "I will talk with a godly man after the service." I charge you first trust in Jesus. Go home alone, trusting in Jesus. "I should like to go into the enquiry-room." I dare say you would, but we are not willing to pander to popular superstition. We fear that in those rooms men are warmed into a fictitious confidence. Very few of the supposed converts of enquiry-rooms turn out well. Go to your God at once, even where you now are. Cast yourself on Christ, now, at once; ere you stir an inch! In God's name I charge you, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ezekiel xxxiii.

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee."—Psalm cxlv. 10.

Do not throw yourselves back in your seats, and say, "This will be a sermon for saints, and therefore we may be excused from attending to it." Do you not see that the first clause gives you a fair word and a kindly hint? "All thy works shall praise thee, O Jehovah." Through this you may enter, as by an open door, for if you are not Jehovah's saints you are his works, and are bound to praise his name. In these days of harvest and full summer-tide, every created thing appears to praise God by its very existence. Insect and fern, pebble and rippling brook, star and cloud, wind and dew,—all reflect the wisdom and goodness of the Most High. Many a man's works are no credit to him, and even in cases wherein men have wrought well, and produced much which is to their honour, yet certain of their works are not to their credit, but deserve to be plunged in darkness. It is never so with a single work of the Eternal; all his works are perfect. He puts no bad work into them, he uses no base material, he never makes up with paint and varnish for grievous deficiencies. Set all his works in the sunlight, ay, put them all under the strongest magnifier, and they tell no tale against him, but they all publish him as the best of workers, the grandest of thinkers, the most complete of designers. You may range high heaven, or descend into the depths of the sea, or dig into the darkest mines; but you will come upon nothing which can find fault with him. You may break God's works in pieces, and examine them in minute detail; you may pass them through the fire again and again: but tested as they may be, they bear but one witness,—

"The hand that made us is divine,"

and that divine hand is excellent in knowledge and power.

All God's works also praise him by a sort of intent, they make praise his glory as of set purpose. We are speaking of the inanimate creation —we say inanimate, but in this matter they seem to be all alive to the glory of the Lord. The worlds that roll through space, and the motes

that dance in the sunshine, the firebolt that levels the tower, and the snow-flakes that dance in his wintry courts, the yeast of the foaming sea, the pollen of the ripening flower, and the cleavage of the crystal, all vie with one another in proclaiming the greatness of the wisdom and the goodness of the Lord. Not alone are the heavens telling the glory of God, and the firmament showing his handiwork, but the earth and the air, the sea and all deep places, the hill-side and the cottage garden, are all emulating each other in the blessed work of praising Jehovah. How often at sunset hath it seemed to us as if God held his court far away in the west, amid the bright and burning clouds, and there the seraphs bowed as visibly as before the throne above! Looking across the sea, when the sun has just been rising in the morning, we have seen the gates of heaven opened, and the skirts of the Lord's robes have been as visible to us as once they were to Moses. At hush of midnight, when ten thousand stars are adoring, earth's stillness proves her to be a profound worshipper. There are a thousand times when nature keeps her special Sabbaths, and in God's temple doth every one speak of his glory.

Arouse thee, then, my friend! Thou art a creature, if not a new creature in Christ Jesus. Adore thy Benefactor if thou dost not know thy Saviour. The known may be a step to the unknown. In joining God's works in his praise, thou mayest be led to join with himself. Thou hast never fully and properly attended to this first call; thou canst not, therefore, complain if thou findest thyself too feeble for the second. Hast thou nothing for which to praise the Lord? Is not thy body a specimen of his handiwork? Are not the organs of nutrition, and the supplies which are given to them, proofs of his goodness? Thy deliverance from fever, and a hundred other deaths, is something worthy of a song. All thy domestic hopes, and joys, and longings, though they reach not to eternal things, and are but draughts from the nether springs, yet do they come from the same hand as the higher boons; and they may lead thee home, for the prodigal, who came back to his father, was sweetly tempted thither by the remembrance of the bread in his father's house, of which there was enough and to spare.

Yet I confess that there is in the text much that is special for a chosen people; it speaks to those who dwell within the inner circle, who by position, character, and privilege are elevated to the highest form of service. Praise is high as heaven, and lasting as eternity, and yet there is something that is better, for it is written—"thy saints shall bless thee."

Everywhere throughout the word of God you see kept up a very clear and sharp distinction between those that fear God and those that fear him not,—between the two seeds, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman,—between those that are living in sin, and those that have been delivered from it, and so are made saints unto God. Two peoples there are, and ever will be while the present dispensation lasts, and the difference between them is great and vital. For this reason it must be difficult, if not impossible, to compose forms of prayer which shall be suitable for two conditions of men so essentially opposite. There should be in our public prayers, as there is in the word of God, this distinction clearly made and manifested. There is a line which divides to-day between Israel and Egypt, even as there will be a line of fire, proceeding from the judgment-seat, which will effectually and finally sever between

the heirs of God and the heirs of wrath. At the very beginning we shall have to remind you that the text suggests this. We are all God's works. "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves"; but we are not all "his people, and the sheep of his pasture." We have not yet all been brought within the bonds of the covenant; we have not yet all been saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and hence we are not all his saints. Divide yourselves by a scriptural judgment. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." Rest in no neutrality. Dream not of communion between Christ and Belial. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." You are either with God or against him, and the sooner you know your true position the better. I shall never preach to you as if you were all alike, for I know you are not. Some of you are in Christ, and others of you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. I shall not to-night forget that I have tares as well as wheat before me, and I shall try to make that distinction appear all through my sermon.

I shall want you carefully to notice three things. The first is, that *God has a people whom he calls his saints:* of these we read in the text. Secondly, *these are placed in the first rank;* for while it is said, "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord," the saints occupy a special position, and they are spoken of by themselves, and put before all others,—"and thy saints shall bless thee." Thirdly, *these people render a special homage.* While they join in the praise which comes up from all God's works, they stand in an inner circle, and fulfil a peculiar ministry, and therefore we read "thy saints shall bless thee."

I. Come, then, to our work. May the Holy Ghost help us! First, GOD HAS A PEOPLE WHOM HE CALLS HIS SAINTS. Who are they? Are they all dead? It is supposed so; for the usage of the Popery around us is to call men saints who have been long in their graves, but living men are not regarded in that light. I notice, even among those who call themselves Protestants, a great many relics of the old harlot of the seven hills, and among the rest this nonsense of dead saintship. Somebody wrote me the other day about his "sainted mother." What did he mean? Had the Pope canonized her? Or did she become a saint by dying? Does death, which came in through sin, bring sainthood with it? Assuredly not. If men are not saints before death, they certainly cannot be made saints after death. Do the coffin and the grave bring you this canonization? Does corruption in the tomb create an odour of sanctity? I am sure that it is not so, for it is written, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Where death leaves us judgment will find us. You cannot make a sinner into a saint by killing him. He who does not live as a saint here, will never live as a saint hereafter. When the apostle Paul wrote letters to the churches, he called the members of them saints. They were living men and women of whom he thus spake. They were ordinary men and women like ourselves; poor in rank, greatly deficient in education, and often without house or home. In some respects they were even inferior to ourselves; for their former conversation had been so exceedingly lax that they ignorantly tolerated sins which in these days would not be endured for

a moment. I believe that the church of God at this day, taken as a whole, is better than the church at Corinth was. For instance, there is no church that I know of, worthy to be called a church of Christ, that would tolerate in its membership one who had been guilty of incest. We should be quite sure to deal with such an open and crying crime as that. We have many faults to-day, and they had a great many faults then, for the apostle had to write to some churches twice over to warn them of certain very apparent evils; and yet, for all that, there were saints in those churches, and Paul was accustomed to address those who were joined together in any one place as those who were called to be saints.

Saints, then, are not people who are dead and buried, and are stuck up in niches for us to admire. There are saints, no doubt, before the throne of God; and we, too, are saints here below if we are what we should be, and if we have received that grace which brings with it deliverance from the reigning power of sin, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

These saints are to be met with in our own country. Many persons have a high esteem for ministers whom they have never seen, who labour in exceedingly remote districts. Of course these good men and their churches must be absolutely perfect: a race of saints. Distance lends enchantment to the view. For my part, I love to believe in the holiness of those who are round about me, in the sanctity of my fellow-labourers, and in the fervent devotion of those who hold up my hands, from day to day, in my work of faith and labour of love. There are as many saints in England as there are in America. I am not inclined to look to the Plymouth church, or the Romish church, or the Greek church, or any other church, for my saints: I find them in the Tabernacle.

> "There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
> There God my Saviour reigns."

It is all very fine to believe in the saintship of the brethren in the Sunderbunds, or in Cathay, wherever those regions may be, but it argues a great lack of faith in the power of the Holy Ghost if we do not believe in his sanctifying influence upon the fellowship at home. I look for my saints among the Christian men and women who are busy all around me in Sunday-school teaching, street-preaching, and other soul-winning work. It is the pure in heart who see God, and I believe it is the pure in heart who see the saints of God. If we were more saintly ourselves, saints would not be half as scarce as they are.

What is it to be a saint? Some people do not want to know, for with them it is a term of contempt. They say, "Oh, he is one of your saints!" They lay the emphasis on the word "saints," as if it were something very disgraceful; or, at least, despicable and hypocritical. Whenever I have that said to me—and it has happened more than once—I take my hat off out of respect to the title. I had rather be a saint than a Knight of the Garter. Sometimes I have said, "I wish you could prove your words"; for surely nobody need be ashamed of being called a saint unless he is afraid that he cannot maintain the name; but if you really are saintly, and men apply the title to you in scorn, wear it upon your sleeve as your honour, and make no attempt

whatever to conceal the soft impeachment. I suppose that nobody would, as a general thing, be ashamed to be called a peer of the realm; but certainly to be a saint is a far more honourable thing than to be a Duke. The peerage the Queen can give; but saintship only God himself can give; and if you have that you need never be ashamed of it. I have sometimes heard of the "Latter Day Saints." I do not know much about them, but I greatly prefer the "Every Day Saints." Those people who are saints anywhere and everywhere are truly saints; and he that is not a saint everywhere is not a saint anywhere, for this is a thing that cannot be put off and on like our Sunday dress. Holiness must be a part of ourselves; it must be our nature to be saintly.

Who, then, are saints? Some will tell us that they are persons who are totally free from sin in thought, and word, and deed; but where will you find these marvellous beings? I have never met with such. I have seen a few hare-brained enthusiasts who said that they were perfect, but you had only to watch them for a single day to discover their defects; but a man absolutely free from all tendency to sin I have never seen on earth, nor have you: I thought we were all sinners, and I have not altered the opinion. I should not think he was much of a saint who did not confess that he was somewhat of a sinner still. I should be afraid that he did not know himself, and that his standard of saintship was not as high as it ought to be. When a man is so good that he cannot be better, I perceive that in some respects he is so bad that he could hardly be worse; for instance, in the matter of pride, he has gone some few degrees beyond Lucifer himself. When a soul is thoroughly saturated with the belief that it can be no better, it will be no better. That holy restlessness which makes a man lament his imperfections, and pine after something more Christlike, is part of the force by which we move upward towards higher degrees of spirituality and grace. Self-satisfaction is the death of progress, and at the same time the discovery of falsehood. The very power to become sanctified has departed from the man who boasts that he is so. A certain great painter had been accustomed to perform great feats with his brush, but one day, having finished a picture, he laid down his palette, and said to his wife, "My power to paint is gone!" "Oh," said she, "how is that?" "Well," he answered, "up to this day I have always been dissatisfied with my productions; but the last picture I have painted perfectly satisfies me, and therefore I am certain that I shall never be able to paint anything worth looking at again." As long as ever a man is dissatisfied with himself, he will be capable of great things; but when he feels that he has attained, and is perfectly satisfied, depend upon it nothing will come of him during the rest of his life. He has lost the very faculty of progress.

Oh, brothers, if we know ourselves and our God, every idea of our being absolutely perfect will make us sick to the death; we know we are nothing of the sort. Still, we also know that sin has not dominion over us, and that we are holiness unto the Lord; and in this we do and will rejoice, and bless the Lord our God.

Taking all that into consideration, we again ask the question, who are saints?

Saints, in the first place, are those whom God has *set apart for himself.* He chose them to be his own portion from before the founda-

tions of the world. He gave them, as men whom he had set apart for himself, into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are the people whom Christ speaks of when he mentions "those whom thou hast given me." These are the saints. These Christ has effectually and specially redeemed from among men, according to that text, "These were redeemed from among men," and again, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it." Whatever the general aspect of redemption—and it has a general one, wide as the race of men—yet it has also a special aspect towards those chosen ones whom God has taken to be his own from amongst all the inhabitants of the earth.

These people being thus God's own, by his electing love, are in due time *called effectually by his grace.* "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Having been redeemed by blood, they are in due time redeemed by power. The power of the Holy Spirit brings them out of Egypt's bondage into the glorious liberty of God's dear Son. From that day these people become manifestly saints, a people that live in God, with God, for God, to God, by God—a people that do not belong to the rest of the world. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." They are a singular people, "a peculiar people." I have heard it objected sometimes, "If I were religious, I should be so peculiar." Of course you would be. Scripture says that you would be. "Oh, but I should be one by myself!" Of course you would be. "Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." These are the saints, then: a people dedicated unto God, through his own rich grace, to live for him: for them to live is Christ. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

But who are the saints, again? How shall we know them?

Well, they are known, next, by *their holy life.* They are not only dedicated to God, but they are made meet for God's use by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Forget not all I have said about our imperfections; but, for all that, God's people are a holy people. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." A man is described in Scripture, not by his infirmities, but by the general run and current of his life. We say of a river that it runs to the south, although there may be eddies along the banks which run in an opposite direction to the main stream. Still, these are an inconsiderable matter. The main stream of the Thames is running constantly towards the sea, and we speak not amiss or untruthfully when we say that it is so. And the main stream and set of the current of the life of a child of God runs towards that which is right, true, and holy, both towards God and towards man. If it is not so with you, dear friend, I make very short work of it: you do not know the Lord. You have need to be born again, and to be delivered from the power of sin. "His servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." Depend upon it, that which governs you is your king; and if evil governs you, then you belong to the evil one. But where there is grace in the heart, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

"Holiness is imputed," says one. It cannot be imputed, say I. The *righteousness* of Christ is imputed to us; but *holiness* is quite another term, and you never find in the word of God mention made of an imputation of holiness. That cannot be. David says, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." These are actual qualities, not imputations. God's saints are not drunkards. God's saints are not liars. God's saints are not dishonest. God's saints are not ungenerous and unloving. God's saints are not a people that take delight in iniquity, and follow after the wages of evil, like Balaam of old. God's people are a people that follow after holiness, and will never be satisfied till sin is exterminated from their hearts, root and branch. In fact, they will never get to heaven till they get that holiness, and when they get that they will be in heaven, for they will awake in the likeness of their Lord. These, then, are the distinguishing marks of the saints of God.

"Where shall we find these saints?" says one. Slander says, "Nowhere," but truthfulness affirms that there are many of them to be found. They are the ornaments of our households, the pillars of our churches, the delights of our communion, and the glory of Christ. Oh, that we might be numbered among them!

Now I want to call your mind back to where we started. Our text speaks of saints; but they are said to be God's saints. "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and *thy* saints shall bless thee." The devil has his saints, and Rome has her saints, and self-righteousness has its saints, and ceremonialism has its saints; but these are not God's saints. God has his own saints, and *they belong to him.* They are peculiarly and especially his. They are as the signet upon his finger. Their names are engraven upon the palms of his hands. You remember how the Good Shepherd speaks of those who believe on him,—"My sheep"—do notice that word "*my*,"—"hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." They are so completely his that they shall be his for ever and ever, and they never can be taken away from him.

II. Well, now, secondly, I want you to notice that THESE ARE PLACED IN THE FIRST RANK, and the reason is of God's grace and mercy, because he has done the most for them. "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord," but "thy saints shall bless thee," because they are in a very peculiar and remarkable manner God's works. God has created all things; but he has *twice created* his saints. He brought the world out of chaos, but he brought his people out of the land of darkness and of the shadow of death, from under the power and domination of every evil thing; yea, even from death, and from hell itself. For them he wrought a creation and a resurrection. You that are his people have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. Of you he says, "Behold, I make all things new." You are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The new creation of saints infinitely surpasses the creation of the world. Saints are even placed higher than the angels who are around the throne of God; "for unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son?" But he has said that

unto you; so that in the scheme of creation you rank above all once-created beings, for you are the twice-born, the twice-made. As in the king's army of old there was a body-guard that always stood about the king, whom they called the immortals, so in God's great host there is a body-guard—his holy ones, his saints, the twice-born, the immortals, of whom Christ says, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

But, again, God's works of grace are not only created by his own power, but in great favour they stand, in a *covenant relation* with himself. Behold, he has made the covenant of day and night, which shall not be broken, and he has made the covenant with the earth that he will no more destroy it with a flood, and he has covenanted that while the earth endureth seed time and harvest, and summer and winter, shall not cease. After the same fashion has he made a covenant with his own redeemed, that he will not be wroth with them, nor rebuke them, world without end. The bow in the cloud is the token of the covenant of preservation which he made with all his works; but when you come to the spiritual covenant, that eternal settlement is made of God, in Christ Jesus, with his chosen, and with them only. None but his own believing people can be said to be interested in the covenant of grace, ordered in all things and sure; for the man Christ Jesus was the Representative of those who are his own body, his own brethren, of whom he says, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." The second Adam is the Head of the new race, which is born under the new covenant, not according to the works of the law, but according to the promise of the grace of God. Isaac, the happy child of Sarah, the free woman, born according to the promise, lives at home with his father, and is heir with his father for ever; but Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, born according to the strength of nature, is banished and cast off, as it is written, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

Oh, rejoice, you people of God, that if there be a covenant with God's ordinary works, there is a higher, better, deeper, and more spiritual covenant made with you!

Further than this, God's *tenderest consideration* is given to his saints. He cares for all the works of his hands. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without being noticed by our Father. God cares for every fish of the sea; and even such fish as never see the light, but dwell in black pools, in the monster caverns of the earth, are not forgotten of him. But as for his children, what care he gives to them! No farmer has as much care for his barn-door chickens as he has for his own little chicks indoors. The Lord cares for all those countless multitudes that wait upon him; but there is the tenderer care of the Father for all those who are allied to him by nature, and are heirs with him by grace. Remember that text, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." There is a special fatherly consideration and pity that the Lord has for all his children.

Let us look back, and think how God has loved us long before we thought of him, and how he has thought of us when we have forgotten him. One said to me, the other day, "What will become of Gordon?" I answered, "He is safe enough, I believe; for he has given himself

into the hand of God, and he will take care of him." To this the questioner replied, somewhat flippantly, "It may be so; but, you see, he is so dashing that he gives God a great deal to think of and to do." I did not like the expression, but still it is exceedingly applicable to many of us; for the office of "Preserver of men" is no sinecure in the case of the Most High. Even a quiet life at home is crowded with the most spiritual, minute, and tender thoughts of God. The Lord's guardian care extends to everything, and to every particle of everything, so that nothing in the whole of life is left to chance, or regarded as a trifle. And how sweetly the Lord cares for us! He does all so quietly, calmly, perfectly. Martha, you see, cannot go about her little room without making a fuss, and complaining of Mary; but the great Father goes about his great house, and takes care of all his children, and never makes a complaint about the greatness of their needs, or the urgency of their necessities, or the repetition of their faults. He "giveth liberally, and upbraideth not." You who are God's saints are first in the Almighty's care. "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me," says David. It is worth while to be poor and needy, if for that reason we have more of the thought of God set upon us. See what a special position you occupy, oh, ye sanctified ones, not only in creation and in the covenant, but in the tender care of God.

And what a position you have as to *God's visits!* "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water." But the visits of God to creation—what are they compared with his visits to us, his own redeemed! When he came to Bethlehem, he did so visit us that he took our nature, and became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. And he wears that nature still. God is still incarnate.

> "He is at the Father's side,
> The Man of love, the Crucified."

To none of his other creatures has he paid such a visit as that. Even now, to-day, you who are humble and contrite are nearer to God than kings and princes. God in his visitations of men astounds us. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Yet he will come to your cottage, come to your chamber, come to your sick bed. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." "Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit."

You see, the saints have the first seats all along, and they hold them to the end of the chapter, for *they shall be crowned* with glory and honour. God crowns the year with his goodness. The time is coming when the Lord will cover the earth with the wheat-sheaf, and with the barley crown, and these shall be followed by the ruddy fruits of the orchard. God shall make glad the heart of man with the varied gifts of his bounty. The earth hath its coronation; but what is the coronation of the saints? "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season;" or, if it be not so with thee, thou shalt behold thy Lord coming here to receive thee, for he hath said it, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself."

There is a glory yet to come to the whole of creation; for its groans

and travail will lead up to its new birth. What a zodiac of glory will flame from the new heavens above the new earth at the latter day! But what of that? The greatest glory is for us to be fashioned, as we soon shall be, in the image of the Son of God, and then to dwell at his right hand for ever. Between God and man there seems to be an infinite distance; yet when you see the God-man, Christ Jesus, you perceive that God has made his creature, man, near of kin unto himself. God has taken man into the nearest possible degree of consanguinity to himself, and has illustrated this by varied degrees of relationship. He has made us to be his sons and daughters, and as a corporate body he has made us to be the spouse, the bride, the Lamb's wife. The Lord Jesus is not ashamed to call us brethren. Thus are we child, spouse, brother. The nearness of our kin to Deity ought to overwhelm us with humble gratitude and with intense delight. God has done infinitely more for us than for all his creatures besides. Rise as you may in creatureship, even till you reach the cherubim and the seraphim, if they be creatures of his hand; even above these stands the Son of God, —the Son of man,—and we are one with him. Oh, the exceeding riches of the grace and the glory of God in his saints!

III. So I finish by noticing, dear friends, that as God has a people called saints, and as he has put them in the front rank, THEY RENDER A SPECIAL HOMAGE to him. This homage is true praise, and yet it has a certain difference of principle in it, so that it is instructive to say, "All thy works shall *praise* thee, O Lord," but "thy saints shall *bless* thee."

Praise is a very proper thing to render to God; and in common with all his works we do render it. But praise has not in it those elements of warmth which belong to blessing God. For instance, you can praise a man, and yet have no kind of regard for him. I suppose that when Wellington defeated the French at Waterloo, there could hardly be found in all the ranks of Napoleon's army men who did not praise Wellington. They said, "He must, indeed, be a marvellous warrior to have annihilated such an army as ours." They could not help praising him, but they could have no love for him, and would no doubt have been heartily glad if he had never existed. In the same way, you probably know men towards whom personally you have no warm feeling, and yet when you see their works you are bound to praise them. A man is an eminent painter, and you exclaim, "His pencil is instinct with life." Still, the man is no friend of yours, you pronounce no blessings on his name. It may be that your feeling towards him is that of deep regret that such abilities should be united with so ill a character. A certain person is exceedingly skilful in his profession, but he treats you unjustly, and, therefore, though you often praise him for his extraordinary performances, you cannot bless him, for you have no cause to do so. I am afraid that there might be such a feeling as that of admiration of God for his great skill, his wonderful power, his extraordinary justness, and yet no warmth of love in the heart towards him. Cold-blooded philosophers have written of God as if he were some far-off abstraction, and they have allowed words to fall from their pens, like masses of ice, which, when we have dissolved them, have been fragrant with reverence. Such men stand like the Israelites, outside the bounds, and gaze at the fire and smoke of Sinai, awe-struck and trembling. As for

us. it is our delight to come up unto God, even within the thick darkness, and to commune with him as a man communeth with his friend. Others may praise God, but it is ours, with our whole hearts, to bless his name. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

Praise is a form of worship in which we cannot attain to communion with God of the highest order; for that we must ascend another step, and learn to bless him. I never read that God praises men. It may be true that in some sense he does so when he says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" but I do not find the expression used in Scripture. God blesses men. Everybody knows that; and therefore when we bless God we enter upon a singularly happy fellowship with him. He blesses us, and we bless him; and herein is communion. I grant you, that between the two blessings there is a very great disproportion; but it is the same word, with much of the same meaning.

Again, God's works all praise him. The lily lifts itself upon its slender stem, and displays its golden petals and its glittering ivory leaves; and by its very existence it praises God. Yonder deep and booming sea rolls up in storm and tempest, sweeping everything before it; and every dash of its waves praises God. The birds in the morning, and some of them all through the night, can never cease from praising; uniting with the ten thousand other voices which make ceaseless concert before the throne. But observe, neither the flower, nor the sea, nor the bird, praises with intent to praise. To them it is no exercise of intellect, for they do not know God, and cannot understand his worthiness; nor do they even know that they are praising him. They exhibit his skill, and his goodness, and so forth, and in so doing they do much; but we must learn to do more. When you and I praise God, there is the element of will, of intelligence, of desire, of intent; and in the saints of God there is another element, namely, that of love to him, of reverent gratitude towards him, and this turns the praise into blessing.

Oh, do you not sometimes feel, as you behold the glory of God, "Let his name be praised for ever and ever"? When you stand at the foot of Calvary you are not only astonished at the glorious love of God in Christ Jesus, but you are melted down, and every beat of your heart is to the tune "Blessed be his name!" Your soul goes out towards Jesus. It is not merely the sense of what he is, but the sense of what he is to you. "He loved me, and gave himself for me." There is a consequent love and gratitude to him who gave these benefits; and then there is a desire that you could do something by way of expressing your deep gratitude to him. You have almost wished that Christ were at your door, hungry, that you might feed him. You cannot do it literally, but he tells you that you can do it in the person of his poor saints. You have thought, "Oh, that he were at my door on some cold night, when the snow was drifting, that I might open unto him, and give him the best place at my table, and my choicest bed. What a host I would be if he would but be my guest!" Now, that is blessing him, an active benevolence towards him. It is not merely praising him, but it is feeling a good-will, a practical desire. If it were possible for you to bestow some good thing on him, you would rejoice to bestow it. If you could do anything to make him more happy than

he is, if that were possible, you wish to do it. It is the end and design of our actions which Christ looks at. It is not merely the hymn we sing, nor the alms we give, nor the service that we render, though all that is part of it; but the innermost soul of blessing God is loving himself, the love that bows over his feet, and wets and waters and washes them with tears,—that unbinds one's locks to wipe those feet,—that finds the precious alabaster-box to break, and pours the contents upon him, —that is not satisfied unless it can do something to show its love,— this is blessing him. Such love thinks nothing of what it does. All its thought is of him, and how it will please him. Oh, for a crown to put upon his head! Oh, for a song to sing at his feet! Oh, for a perfect heart, that I might reserve it for him alone! Oh, that I had a soul as wide as heaven, that I might entertain my Lord, and him only! Nay, even that were not large enough. Oh, that I could turn space into a great mouth with which to speak his praise, and make all eternity the song, and infinity the music!

We cannot reach half way to our desire, and so we have to wind up by saying, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" Go in, dear hearts, and sit like David before the Lord, and cry, "Whence is this to me?" Then go out, and talk about him to your friends, and say great things and choice things concerning him. Make him a glorious God in their ears. Tell them there never was such a friend, or helper, or Saviour, or father, or brother, or husband, as your God has been to you. Make them hear it,—that you are the happiest of men because you have found the blessed God. Make all to know it,—that you are the most contented of men because you have chosen the good part, which is to sit at the feet of Jesus. Do bless him in secret; and then bless him with the few that are your daily companions, and if God has given you the tongue of eloquence, bless his name before the crowds, and never be ashamed. Tell them that there is no life like life for God; there is no joy like joy in Christ, no riches like the riches of God's grace, no heaven like the heaven of dwelling for ever with him. Oh, speak well of him, and when you have spoken your best of him, then wish to begin again, and speak better; and when you have reached to that, and said your best things, then say, "These are nothing compared with what he deserves. I will try again, and yet rise beyond the loftiest conceptions of the present."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxlv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—145, 135, 221.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HOW TO MEET THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 31ST, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me."—Matthew xv. 24, 25.

YOU that know the loving heart of our Lord Jesus are quite sure that he would never needlessly discourage a soul in coming to him. Yet in this case "he answered her not a word." Is Jesus dumb when misery entreats a word from him? The Friend of Man is usually all attraction, encouragement, drawing, and welcoming, and yet the eager woman cries in vain to him for her tormented daughter! We are not disquieted about this. We know our Lord too well to suspect him of a want of love. He is not sporting with a wounded bird. He is in no fit of bitterness. He would not even seem to discourage any heart that beat within a human bosom, unless there had been some great necessity for it, some gracious end to be served thereby.

Nobody will have the impudence to accuse our divine Lord of undue harshness to a soul that sought his help. The world might suspect some of his ministers of being hard and cold, like yon pulpits of marble which have in these chill times been exalted among the people. They might think some of us more touchy than tender; for are not some of us, great stone creatures, almost without feeling, and not easily to be approached? People may suspect that *we* are scant in affection, or that *we* lack earnestness; they may even hint that *we* are too great sticklers for orthodoxy, or that we are so distrustful of our fellow-men that we naturally love to try them with things harsh and forbidding, in order to keep them a good mile off at the least. I know they think us sorry fathers, more ready with the rod than with our cheering sympathies; but for this they have far too much justification. I would it were not so. You may suppose hard things of *us*, who are his servants: the supposition may be true, it may be slanderous: but you cannot suppose anything of the kind concerning the Lord Jesus Christ: he is so evidently loving, gracious, cordial, that you could not have the heart to suspect *him*. If Jesus has ever received *you*, you have had in that fact

unquestionable proof of his tenderness, and you are, and will be henceforth, confident in his compassion. You are sure that the "bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench," for he neither broke nor quenched *you.* Yet he did discourage this woman. Not only the disciples did so, but the Master did so, too. Therefore, I say that there must have been a secret need for so doing: there must have been a motive for her good which moved the tender Lord to answer her with words so hard, and with speeches so dispiriting.

I believe that we, dear friends, the humble imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ, are bound to encourage all in whom there is any hopefulness. Whenever we see a wandering soul turning its face homewards, we should be ready to lend a hand to direct its tottering footsteps. Still, if we imitate our Lord, we may be led to say sore things which, like the faithful wounds of a friend, are as sharp as they are salutary. Love's lips do not always drop honey. Flattery charms with her dulcet periods, but a wise affection full often uses tones most harsh and cutting. There is a tendency among certain goody-goody people to comfort too much, and to keep back important truths for fear they should be misunderstood. Glorious doctrines which made our fathers strong are left in the shade, for fear they should become stumbling-blocks to unsettled minds. We are coming to be rather overdone with *infants' prepared gospel;* they are putting the flour through so many sieves that there will not be an ounce of bone-making material left in it. If it were always wise to comfort and encourage, the Master would have kept to that line of things; and, since he did not do so, I assume—and I think that none will dare to contradict me—that men require something else beside encouragement. Do we not read that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works"? There are truths which ought not to be kept back because they may not encourage, for their use is to reprove and correct. There are truths which at certain seasons ought to be told, even though the temporary effect thereof may be to damp the ardour or to dull the hope of the sinner who is coming to Christ. Like our Master, we must always long after the salvation of sinners; but, like him, we must go about it wisely. We must exhibit great fatherly tenderness toward sinners; and be very gentle, even as a shepherd is with the lambs; but yet that very love, that very tenderness, will lead the well-instructed teacher to utter many things which the disciple had rather not hear. Our shepherdry deals not only with the green pastures, but also with the place of the sheep-washing and the shearing. We have not only to console, but to correct: ours is the edification which deals frequently with pulling down dilapidated bits of wall, in order to the security of the whole fabric; and hence we occasionally seem to be destroyers where we are really builders together with God. Our Lord knew that plain speech upon a certain truth would weed out his disciples. Did he therefore preserve a discreet silence? Not he. In due time he delivered his soul, and we read "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

Come we now to consider why the Saviour spake to this woman in this way. Why did he announce to her a fact which could not possibly

assist or strengthen her faith? We may learn the answer as we proceed.

Our Lord Jesus virtually discouraged the Syrophenician woman with the doctrine of election. I grant you that there is a difference between the election of the nation of Israel and the election of individuals; but into that we are not going to-night. The point is this: it was the doctrine of election which the Saviour threw in this poor woman's way. He said to her, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This was enough to damp her spirit, surely, and yet the Saviour put it before her there and then.

Why? I think he did so, first, at that time, *that it might come from him rather than from the disciples.* If you feel it needful that a person should be somewhat sharply rebuked, you conclude to do it yourself. You say to yourself, "If I send that message by the best friend I have he will blunder over it; he will make it more cutting than I meant it to be, and yet he will miss the point. He will inflict more pain than I intended; therefore, I will communicate the unacceptable statement myself." And have you not often felt it to be a matter of real urgency to get before all others? Yes; you who have the care of hearts and minds know that there are times when you want to do all the speaking, and would like to block every other telephone in the world. You know the person, and the effect which statements are likely to have upon him, and therefore you would fain monopolise his ears for a season. The Saviour knew that by-and-by this woman would hear that the mission of the Christ was only to Israel; and she might hear it in such a way as would much more depress her spirit than if he personally told it to her himself. So he himself said to her, "I am not sent to Tyre and Sidon. I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That is to say, Christ's mission as a prophet while he was here in the flesh was to Israel; and to Israel he usually restricted his labours throughout his life. He told her that himself, I think, lest she should hear it at second hand. It will be wise for us, when we find poor souls hopefully coming to Christ, to manifest thought and prudence, and introduce them to the deeper truths of our theology; because they will hear of them one way or another; and they had better hear of them first from loving, tender-hearted Christians, than from hard, careless, loveless spirits, whose delight is found in mere terms and phrases. You cannot keep these young people in a conservatory; why should you wish to do so? It is poor policy to try and conceal truth. It has a little of a Jesuitical look about it. Why should this particular truth be concealed? Are we ashamed of it? If so, let us revise our creed; but in the name of common honesty let us hide nothing which we believe. The more light the better. The more fully truth is made known the more surely will good come of it. For one, I bless God that I knew the doctrines of grace from my youth; they have been the staff of my manhood, and I believe they will be the glory of my old age. So far from being ashamed of the election of grace, it commands the enthusiasm of my whole being.

Again, I think that he brought that truth before her mind just then because *she might hear of it otherwise, when she was in a worse condition for the receiving of it.* Now, this woman was desperately set on getting

a blessing from Christ. Her whole heart was awake; her spirit was on fire; her whole nature was eager for the blessing. If she could stand repression at any time in her life, it was just then. "How do you know?" say you. I know it by a kind of instinct. The story opens for me a window into the woman's soul. I am persuaded that the Master would not have applied anything that looked like a discouraging truth to her unless he had perceived that she was quite able to bear it, and perhaps better able to bear it *then* than upon some future day. I think there is great wisdom in communicating truth to people at a fit time. Did not the Lord himself say, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now"? Just at that time his disciples were unfit to hear those many truths, and therefore the oracle of love was silent for a while. At another time the Saviour abounded toward them, as he does toward us, in all wisdom and prudence, and then he made known to them the mystery of his will after a fuller measure. The Lord does not teach us all truth at once, but by degrees he admits us into the chambers of his hid treasure. You know how a surgeon, when he has operated upon a blinded eye, says to his patient, "Your sight is completely restored, but during the next few days I must ask you to sit in a darkened room. I shall ask you to receive light slowly, that you may retain it surely."

Infinite is the wisdom of the Holy Ghost in gradually enlightening souls. The Lord does not all at once let the sinner know the full extent of his sin, nor does he give him a full idea of the punishment due to it; nor, I think, does he give him at the beginning all the knowledge he will have of the complete pardon of his sin, and of the innumerable joys which come to pardoned sinners through Jesus Christ their Saviour. Little by little, as we must feed newly-born children, not with meat, but with milk; little by little, as you teach the younger scholars in the school. Precept must be upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little. His mission to the house of Israel was one of the truths which the Saviour saw this poor Canaanitish woman would have to learn, and therefore he communicated it to her when she had faith enough to press over all discouragement, and obtain the blessing upon which her heart was set.

These two things should prove instructive. Now I go on to deal with souls who are somewhat in this woman's case. I shall notice *the discouraging word which has come to them of late*, which is somewhat similar to that which came to her; and then I shall ask them to imitate *the commendable act of this woman* in connection with her discouragement, for though she seemed to be repulsed, she nevertheless came to Christ and worshipped him. Before concluding, I wish to mention *a few helpful considerations* to any who may be troubled by that great doctrine which I mentioned just now. Come, Holy Comforter, and fill our hearts with heavenly cheer from this glad hour!

I. First, then, THE DISCOURAGING WORD THAT CAME TO THIS WOMAN. It was, as I have said, a certain form of the doctrine of election; the unquestioned truth that God designed to bless the seed of Israel by the personal labours and testimonies of his Son Jesus, and that these blessings were not at that time sent to the people of Tyre and Sidon.

The doctrine of election has been made into a great bugbear by its

unscrupulous opponents and its injudicious friends. I have read some very wonderful sermons against this doctrine, in which the first thing that was evident was that the person speaking was totally ignorant of his subject. A little knowledge would have made our author hesitate and deliberate, and therefore it was like Saul's armour to him; he had rather proceed in his naked folly. The usual way of composing a sermon against the doctrine of grace is this,—first exaggerate and belie the doctrine, and then argue against it. If you state the sublime truth as it is found in the Bible, why, you cannot say much against it; but if you collect a number of silly expressions from hot-headed partizans, and denounce these, your task will be easier. Dress up the doctrine like a guy, and then burn it! What a wonderful deal has been done by men in burning figures of their own stuffing! Nobody ever believed the doctrine of election as I have heard it stated by Arminian controversialists. I venture to say that nobody out of Bedlam ever did believe that which has been imputed to us. Is it remarkable that we are as eager to denounce the dogmas imputed to us as ever our opponents can be? Why do they earnestly set themselves to confute what no one defends? They might as well spare themselves the trouble. Our friends abhor the doctrine as it is stated by themselves, and we are much of their mind; though the doctrine itself, as we would state it, is dear to us as life itself. They suppose that we never preach the gospel freely to sinners, which thing we never fail to do with a freeness which none can excel. Can they tell us how we can improve in gospel preaching, for we should rejoice to learn? They say that if we preach the gospel freely we are inconsistent, to which charge we are at no pains whatever to reply. So long as we believe that we are consistent with Scripture, it never enters into our heads to want to be consistent with ourselves. To hold all revealed truth is our desire, but to compress it all into a symmetrical creed is beyond our expectation. We are such poor fallible creatures that if we were once to fabricate a system which should be entirely logical, we should feel sure that we must have admitted portions of theory and masses of mere guess-work into the singular fabric. In theology we live by faith, not by logic. We believe and are safe; but the moment we begin to speculate we are like Peter sinking in the waves. If we will keep simply to what the word of God says, we shall find in it truths apparently in conflict, but always in agreement. On every subject there is a truth which is set over against another truth: the one is as true as the other; the one does not take away from the other, nor raise a question upon the other; but the one ought to be stated as well as the other, and the two set side by side. The two relative truths make up the great road of practical truth, along which our Lord travels to bless the sons of men. Some like to run on one rail. I confess a partiality to the two, and I should not like to make an excursion to-morrow on a railway from which one of the rails had been taken.

It must be sorrowfully admitted that the doctrine of election has discouraged many who were seeking the Saviour, but the truth is that *it ought not to do so.* Viewed aright, it is a royal herald arrayed in silk and gold, freely announcing to the unworthy that the King receiveth sinners, according to the good pleasure of his will. How it has encouraged

some of us! What marrow and fatness it is to us now that we have found the Lord! We feed upon it as upon a divine portion, which sustains, satisfies, and satiates the soul. When I first came to Christ I was perfectly satisfied to be as one of the dogs under the table, but I should not be satisfied to be so now, since the Lord has called me to a higher place. Now that I have become one of his children, I am as Lazarus was, of whom we read, "but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him." The blessed doctrine of election is to my soul as wines on the lees well refined. It is a better, deeper, and more glorious fact of divine love than I ever hoped to realise. "He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish." We asked for pardon, but he gave us justification; we asked for a little mercy, but the Lord gave us boundless grace, yea, grace upon grace, saying,—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Did a sinner really know the doctrine of the choice of grace he would not run away from it, but he would be inclined to run into its arms.

Yet to many it does seem to be as that black side of the cloud which the Lord turned upon the Egyptians; and therefore I am going to notice the discouragement as Christ put it before this woman. He said to her, first, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." "I am sent," he seemed to say, "to the Jews. I am sent to the house of Israel, but I am not sent to you." That great truth she would have been sure to find out sooner or later, and if she had found it out later, she might have feared that the cure of her daughter would be taken away from her because it had been received contrary to the mission of the Messiah. Jesus lets her know this hard truth at once, so that it may not worry her afterwards. When she did obtain the cure of her daughter, he would have her know that it was given openly and above-board, and not by a blunder of pity, or an oversight of charity. She was to be once for all assured that the Lord Jesus had not forgotten himself,—that he knew all about the limitation of his commission during his mortal life, and that in overstepping it he knew what he was doing, and had not been wafted beyond himself by the impetuosity of his spirit.

Now, there is such a thing as *the choice of God.* The Lord has a people who are redeemed from among men. The Lord Jesus has a people of whom he has said, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." Some are ordained unto eternal life, and therefore believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Does this fact discourage you? I do not see why it should. Why should not you be among that number? "But suppose that I am not?" says one. Why do you not suppose that you are? You do not know anything about it: therefore why suppose at all? To give up supposing would be a far more sensible thing than to brew for yourself a deadly potion of despair out of the worthless husks of mere supposition. I have enough to do to bear up under facts, without overloading myself with conjectures. What God has not revealed we are not bound to know. Indeed, it would seem better for us to be in ignorance where the Lord grants no information. The Lord has chosen a people to be saved, and I feel glad to think that he has done so, for none can prove that I am not of the number. If there are some whom

God will save, then I know also who they are, for he tells me that they are such as repent of sin, confess it, forsake it, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. These same things would my soul desire to do, and when I do so, I know that I am of the chosen number, and shall be saved. What is there in this to discourage a soul? Yet it does discourage some. When people are in the dark they are afraid of anything, everything! nothing!! "There were they in great fear, where no fear was." Once get a person into a low and nervous state, and the fall of a leaf suggests an avalanche, the least shadow of a cloud foretells the total extinction of the orb of day, while a drop of rain is the commencement of the final conflagration! "Odd expression," say you. Yet it is not so singular and outrageous as many of the inferences drawn by a resolute despondency. Alas, for these troubled ones, they feel that they cannot be saved because there is an Israel whom God has chosen to be saved!

Our Lord put before this woman something worse than the positive fact of the choice of Israel, he declared *the negative side of the sacred choice.* He said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It is very little that you and I who are ministers of the gospel have to do with preaching about what Christ is not sent to do. Here I fear that unrenewed minds, armed with a pitiless logic, have sinned grievously against the love of God. Truth treated scripturally is a holy medicine, but treated after the manner of the schools it may sour into a deadly poison. Poor penitent hearts, there is nothing in the divine decree to shut out one of you from hope. "The Lord hath not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; he hath not said unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain." Nevertheless, the Saviour did distinctly turn the blackest side of the doctrine to the woman, and say, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

What was worse in her case was that she knew that this election, as far as Christ had stated it, *must exclude her;* for he told her that he was not sent save to the house of Israel, and she well knew that she did not belong to that house. She was a Canaanitish woman, a native of Tyre and Sidon, and therefore distinctly shut out; and *Jesus himself had told her so.* That must have made the sentence fall like a death-knell on her ear. If the servants tell us such a thing as that, we can forget it, but if the Master says, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," then the matter ends in blank despair. The poor Canaanitish woman might very logically have ended her pleadings, saying, "What more can be done? I cannot go against the word from Christ's own lip." Yet she did not so; but like a true heroine she pressed her suit even to the joyful end. You see her cause for discouragement was much worse than yours can ever be, for you do not know that you are shut out: there is nothing in your race or city which excludes you. Moreover, Christ has never told you that you are shut out. I do not think that any minister has ever told you so; and if you have ever gathered from any ministry under heaven that there is no hope for you, you have no right to come to such a conclusion. In my soul's intent I have never desired the discouragement of a single soul among you all. Far rather would I die that you might live. But if you have copied out bitter words, and have come to wretched conclusions, then I

would urge you to be as sensible and as brave as this woman was, who, when she had not gathered it from ministers, but had received it from Christ himself that he was not sent to such as she was, yet nevertheless persevered, and pressed forward, and came to him and worshipped him, saying, "Lord, help me."

Some may say to me this evening,—"Why talk about this difficulty at all?" I talk about it because it exists. It frets and worries many minds. Many are troubled, and the servants of God must deal with their trouble. Gladly enough would I let these fears alone if they would let my people alone. The stern fact of predestination meets most men somewhere or other; even in the paths of philosophy it is not escaped; and when it comes darkly over truly gracious souls, much of its power for mischief will lie in the ignorance of the person assailed. If we were better instructed we should probably find no mystery where all is mystery now. Men forget that the ordination of God deals with everything; not only with the spiritual, but quite as certainly with the natural world. Yet they never allow it to interfere with their labour for bread, their struggle for wealth, or their race for fame. Why should they dissociate the matter of salvation from the ten thousand affairs which are encompassed in the same ring? Why will men act in other matters according to common sense, and upon this matter make molehills into mountains? They fancy that the will of God settles one or two matters, and leaves all the rest loose; they dream that it takes away free agency and responsibility, and makes men into machines. They cannot understand that divine plan which interferes with no will of man, and yet secures the will of God; nor can they see how everything proceeds by the free agency of the creatures as much as if there were no God, and yet God ruleth over all. I wish that this subject did not vex men, but it is idle to wish. It has vexed them from the beginning, and will vex them even to the end. As we cannot alter facts we must deal with them. Dear troubled souls, Jesus would have you come to him without fear. He invites you to trust in him; yea, more, he commands you to believe on his name. Nothing he has thought, or ordained, or purposed, or predestinated has any tendency to drive you from him. Whatever predestination may or may not be, this one thing is sure,—"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Everything beckons towards his cross, and himself. Come, and let nothing hinder you even for a single hour.

II. Now, observe THE COMMENDABLE ACT OF THIS WOMAN. In considering what she did, we shall come to the practical part of the subject. And I notice that she did not attempt for a single moment to deny what Jesus had said. He said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and she did not reply, "Lord, that is not true." She did not question anything which Jesus asserted: that would have been gross presumption on her part. She did not cavil, or object, or raise opposition. She accepted what Jesus said without any argument whatever. She did not attempt to say that it was unjust that the Christ of God should come only to the house of Israel. She did not assert, as some have shamelessly done, that God should deal with one as with another, or else he would be a respecter of persons. All that kind of thing, which we have heard so often, was far from her mind. She was

silent and submissive as to the Saviour's speech. She did not even argue that surely, in her solitary instance, she might be permitted to break through the regulation. She did not argue at all. She left the truth, which to her was dark, in the keeping of him whose name is light. She sees the black cloud, but she passes through it, feeling that it cannot be anything more than a cloud, and so she comes to the Saviour's feet, and cries "Lord, help me. I do not understand this. I am all in a fog, and all in a muddle. Lord, help me. Lord, I do not ask to understand, but I do cry for help. Enable me to believe, and to receive the blessing, let the dark truth say what it may."

Many persons are so weak in judgment that if they have to do battle with a difficulty before they can be saved they will perish in the attempt. Oh, poor heart, do not battle with a difficulty at all! Leave it alone. If it be a great truth *for men*, and you are nothing but *a babe*, and hardly that; do not choke yourself with man's meat. If a great mystery meddles with you, then fly to Jesus Christ for relief from it, with this prayer in your mouth, "Lord, help me. I am in a difficulty, help my understanding; I am in despondency, help my heart; but especially, I am full of iniquity, help my poor and sorrowful case, and do for me what I cannot do for myself. Save my soul and deliver me."

Now, then, we have seen what she did not do, and in this she is admirable; let us see what the woman actually did. She came to Jesus. Read the words, "Then came she and worshipped him."

First, *she came to Jesus*, and did not go round about. She came not to Peter, or James, or John, but she came to Jesus. She did not stand still and cry, as she had done before from a distance, crying unto him; but she came to Jesus, drew nigh to him, grasped him, I do not doubt fell at his feet as though she would have held him. She came to Jesus. Now, from everything beneath the heavens, poor soul, fly you to the living, personal Christ. There is such a One now living as Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, whose delight it is to deal with the sicknesses, infirmities, and diseases of men. Do not, I pray you, stop in doctrines, or in precepts, or in ministers, or in services; but come straight away to Christ—the living, personal Saviour, anointed of the Lord. In him your hope lies. "Which way shall I go?" say you. If it were a matter of physical coming, I know that if the road were long and dreary, you would start upon it to-night without delay. But it is a mental coming. You are to come to Jesus, not with feet and legs, but with mind and heart. Remember that there is such a Person. Consider him. Think of him. Believe him. Reverence him, for he is the Son of the Highest. Trust him, for he is "mighty to save." This is coming to him. Since he is a Saviour, let him fulfil his office upon you. You greatly need saving, give him the opportunity of showing what he is able to do. Say within your own soul, "I the chief of sinners am; lost, ruined, and undone. Behold, I come to him. If I perish, I will perish trusting in him." It cannot be that a soul can die relying upon Jesus; sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than Jesus fail to save the soul that trusteth in him.

The woman came to Jesus immediately that he uttered this word of discouragement. We read in the text, "*Then* came she." "Then came she and worshipped him." What, *then?* When he seemed to drive her

away? Then? Why, he had just told her that he was not sent to her. "*Then* came she." He had just uttered a most mysterious and discouraging truth, but "Then came she." That kind of faith which comes to Christ only on a summer's day among the lilies of the field is not of much account. Flowers and butterflies and all things which come of the calm and the bright are soon gone; we need a hope which can survive the frost. That is the sort of faith which comes to Jesus in the middle of winter, when the cold devours, and the fierce blast prowls among the snow-drifts. That is the faith which saves the soul—the faith which ventures to the Saviour in despite of all weathers. Saving faith learns to credit contradictions, to laugh at impossibilities, and to say, "It cannot be, but yet it will be."

Our poor friend who was buffeted by our Lord's word was secretly upheld by the sight of his person. What can a word be compared with a person—compared with such a person as that of Jesus, the Sinner's Friend? She believes *him* rather than his way of speaking. He says that he is not sent, but there he is. He says that he is not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel: and yet *there he is*. He has come here where there are none of the house of Israel. She seems to say to herself, "Whether he was sent or not, here he is. He has come among Tyrians and Sidonians, and I have come to him, therefore he is not kept from me by his commission. I do not understand his language, but I do understand the look of his face, I do understand his manner. I do understand the winsomeness of his blessed person. I can see that compassion dwells in the Son of David. I am sure that he has all power given to him to heal my daughter; and here he is. I do not know about his commission, but I do know himself, and I shall still plead with him." So she came to Jesus there and *then*, and why should not you?

Now, soul, is this the darkest night that ever was over thee? Come to Jesus now. Are you quite sure that your case is hopeless? Quite certain that your doom is sealed? Have you written out your own death-warrant? Have you made a covenant with death and a league with hell? Do you feel sure that you will be damned before the morning light breaks on you? Then come to Jesus Christ *now*. "*Then* came she." That is the thing—to come to Christ when he has a drawn sword in his hand, as Bunyan puts it,—to come to Christ when he frowns,—to come to Christ when everything says "keep back." "Then came she." Brave woman! I will even do the like.

But now notice how she came. "Then came she *and worshipped him*." My heart greatly rejoices. I wish I could picture the scene. She did not stop to work out the difficult question with which he posed her; but she looked at him, and she came to him, and when she got near to him she did the best thing she could,—she worshipped him. Down she went on her face before him, and when she did look up it was with a look of reverent awe and childlike confidence. Blessed be his name, if we cannot understand him we can worship him.

Now, you have been thinking about yourself, and the more you do this the more you will despond and despair. No possible comfort can come to you by that road. If I were you, I would give up that task, and now begin to think about Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour of

men. "Oh, but I am such a sinner!" Yes, and he is such a Saviour. "Sir, I am so black!" But he is able to make us whiter than snow. "Alas, I greatly deserve his curse!" Yes, but he was "made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." By death the Lord has put that curse away. Behold him then upon the cross removing human sin, and see if you cannot copy the woman's example,—"Then came she and worshipped him." Now, try, poor timorous spirit—try and worship. This is a homage which a humble heart can render in acceptable style. A self-conceited heart will do anything sooner than worship. Pride, and self, and rebellion cannot worship; but humble hearts are happy in the deed. Oh, that you would now bow with me before the Lamb of God! Worship him now! "Blessed Son of God! Blessed Son of God! that ever thou shouldst become man for men, and die in the sinner's stead! Oh, thy love! Thy wondrous love! And thou art gone up into the glory now. Thou sittest at the right hand of God, and there I worship thee as my Lord and my God. If I may not call thee my Saviour, yet thou shalt be my God. If I may not rejoice in thee, at least I will worship thee." This is holy talk. It hath a perfume about it which the Lord loveth. That way faith will come to you. That way life and peace and rest will come to you. This trembling Canaanite "came to him and worshipped him": follow her and share her blessedness.

Then, notice *her prayer*. One has well observed that if you were on a rotten piece of ice, and you could not get to the shore, or feared that you could not, one of the very best ways would be to go down on all fours and try to crawl along as gingerly as you could, and long to quit the ice and get on to the shore somehow. This woman so proceeds. She seems to fall flat upon that awful truth which she cannot understand. She adores and worships and reverences him that spoke it, and thus she outspreads her weakness upon every possible resting-place, and comes safe to shore. "Lord," she says, "help me. Oh, do not put me back, but help me. Lord, do not leave me but help me. Whatever thou hast to say to me, say it, and I will worship thee whilst thou dost say it.

> Though thou slay me, I will trust,
> Praise thee even from the dust;

but, Lord, help me." My dear hearer, do that, and do it *now*. No doctrine will trouble you long: I am sure it will not. On the contrary, you will enquire why you did ever let it trouble you. Do you ever let predestination trouble you in the matter of your daily business? To-morrow you hope to make a few shillings at your daily calling, but it may be that you will not, you may lose it. Why do you not say to yourself, "It may be that the providence of God has arranged that I shall not earn anything to-morrow; therefore I shall stop at home and do nothing"? Why, you are not such a fool. You will take down your shop shutters, display your goods, and do your best; or you will go out to your calling and look for your usual wage. Let the providence of God do what it may, your business is to do what you can. So is it with a poor seeking soul; that soul's business is to let the Lord do what he wills, but meanwhile to cry, "Lord, help me." Wholly submissive, but heartily adoring, lie at Jesus' feet and

believe that this divine Saviour must and will save every soul that hangs upon him. This is the way of wisdom; follow it. God help you to do so, and to do so at once.

I do not think that I need to say anything more by way of comforting you, for that may well suffice, if the Lord shall incline your heart to seek his face at once. Remember this, however, that there never was a soul yet that came to Christ and Christ did cast it away. Remember, again, that there never can be such a soul, for he has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Remember, again, that every soul that ever did come to Christ came because the Father drew him, and that every soul that came found out afterwards that there was an election of grace that encompassed him, and that he was in it. Even this poor woman turned out to be one that Christ was sent to bless. Although, as a general matter of fact, in his lifetime he came to the seed of Israel, just as the prophets came to Israel, yet there always appeared an exception about the prophets, and therefore it was no marvel that there should be exceptions in the case of their Lord. Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, but unto none of them was the prophet sent save to a woman of Sarepta, who belonged to the very city out of which this woman came. Many lepers were in Israel in the days of Elisha; yet none of them was healed save Naaman the Syrian. Naaman did not belong to the favoured race at all, but was a far-off stranger, and yet he received the blessing of healing from the Lord God of Israel. The election of God as to these temporal things did seem to exclude all but the seed of Israel, but it was only in seeming; there were always some strangers in the chosen line; and so that particular form of election which consisted in our Lord's personal ministry being only to the Jews did not cause the exclusion of this poor believing woman. To her Jesus Christ had manifestly come in the chosen line, for *there he was!* He was outside his own boundary! He had come to her! Now, at this moment, whatever you may think about this doctrine or that, *Jesus Christ has come to you.* I have preached to you his truth, and you have heard it. Ay, and you have felt something of its power. Yield to it, I beseech you. If you yield to it, and come to him and trust him, then rejoice that the lines of electing love have encompassed you. You are his. You could not and would not have come to him in prayer and simple faith, if it had not been so. Your coming to him proves that his eternal love of old went after you. Go home, O woman of a sorrowful spirit, and be no more sad. The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xv. 10—39.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—326, 499, 603.

The Preacher has passed through a furnace of pain during the past few days, and it is with extreme difficulty that he has been able to revise the sermons. He begs the prayers of affectionate friends for his speedy restoration. At this season of the year the funds for various parts of the Lord's work are running out rapidly, and next to nothing is coming in. Those who find it a joy to lessen the burden of the Lord's servant will know that to be free from all temporal care is a great relief in the hour of crushing agony.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SIGHT FOR THOSE WHO SEE NOT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, AUGUST 14TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."—John ix. 39.

THE great day of judgment is not as yet. God in infinite long-suffering waiteth to be gracious, giving men space wherein to repent, and to be reconciled to him. Jesus has come into the world for judgment, but not for that last and eternally unchangeable judgment which awaits us all. That hour and that advent will arrive: we have the declaration of God's word for it. Read Matthew xxv. "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." There is no question as to this sure fact: even if many more centuries should pass away, the dread assize will be held in due season. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." He is full of tenderness and long-suffering, and therefore he tarries; but the vision will come, it will not tarry. Settle this in your minds, and live as in the presence of that august tribunal.

Though the Day of Judgment be not at this hour, yet our Lord Jesus is now carrying on a form of judgment in the world. "His fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor." He sits as a refiner separating ever and anon his silver from the dross. His cross has revealed the thoughts of many hearts, and everywhere his gospel is acting as a discoverer, as a separater, and as a test by which men may judge themselves, if they will. It is a very happy circumstance when a man is willing to accept the Lord's judgment day by day, permitting the law itself to judge him before the Lawgiver ascends the tribunal. Happy are those people towards whom a present judgment is being exercised, of whom Paul saith, "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." Saints are judged now by a fatherly discipline, that they may not be judged hereafter by a judicial condemnation.

Our Lord's great design in coming into the world is the salvation of men. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved"; but, in order to that salvation, it is necessary that men should know the truth about themselves, and should take up a truthful position before God; for God will not endure a lie, neither will he save men upon false grounds. He will deal with all his creatures according to truth; if he condemn them it will be because equity requires it, and if he save them it will be because he has found a way by which mercy and truth are met together.

So, then, everywhere throughout the world, wherever Christ comes—comes by his gospel and the consequences of it—a judgment is going on. Men are set before the judgment-seat of their Saviour: they are tested, tried, made manifest, and declared. Light no sooner comes into the world than it begins to judge the darkness. Scarcely had it been known to be darkness if the light had not revealed the contrast. Where the gospel comes, some hearts receive it at once, and are judged to be "honest and good ground": men who are willing to accept the gospel come to the light that their deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God. Other hearts at once hate the truth, for they are the children of darkness, and therefore "they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." You see, then, how without its being the main intention of Christ's coming into the world, it yet becomes a secondary effect, and, so far, an incidental purpose of his coming, that his very appearance among the sons of men should judge them. In this glass they see their own countenances, and discover their spots; by this plummet-line they test their own uprightness, and see how far they lean towards evil. Under the sign of the gospel the Lord has set up a public weigh-house. Do you not see the great scales?—they are correct to a hair. Come hither and test yourselves. Even in this banqueting-house of love truth marks her own, and sets her brand on counterfeits. God hath a fire of trial in Zion, and a furnace of test in Jerusalem.

At this hour I pray that the gospel may have a dividing effect in this house.

Observe with care that *wherever Jesus Christ comes the most decided effects follow.* "I am come that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." Neither to the right nor to the wrong is Christ indifferent. Whoever you may be, if you hear the gospel at any time it must have some effect upon you. It will either be to your soul "a savour of life unto life," or else "a savour of death unto death." It will be antidote or poison, curing or killing, softening the conscience or searing it. It will either make you see, or else, because you fancy that you see, its very brightness will make you blind, like Saul of Tarsus, who cried, "I could not see for the glory of that light." You cannot be indifferent to the gospel if you become a hearer of it. "I am come," said Christ—that fact none of you can escape: "for judgment I am come," and that judgment must take place in your mind and conscience whether you will it or not. This coming and judgment have a wonderfully marked and decided effect. It is not that of a little improvement or of slight alteration; it is the turning of things upside down, so "that they which see not might see, and that

they which see might be made blind." It is a very violent change,—from light to darkness, or from darkness to light. In either case it is an absolute reversion of condition. Now, the gospel will do just that for you: if you live without it, it will make you die; if you feel that you are dead without it, it will make you live. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away."

Learn hence that there will always be some effect upon the human mind wherever Christ comes; and that this effect will be a very decided one, changing all their conditions as much as if the laws of nature were reversed. The Lord's approach to a soul will lift it into the light more and more gloriously; or else it will plunge it into deeper darkness, deeper responsibility, deeper guilt, and consequently deeper woe.

Well may we justify that faithful preacher of the word who, in the middle of his sermon, suddenly stopped, and cried, "Woe is me! What am I doing? I am preaching Christ to you, and while I hope some of you are receiving him, and so I am leading you toward heaven, many others of you are rejecting him, and thus I am increasing your responsibility and your guilt. Thus I am doing evil instead of good to you. Woe is me!" God help his poor servant: I have often felt the sweet preaching of the gospel to be bitter work. I do not wonder that dark thoughts come over the earnest preacher; I wish his hearers would partake with him in his anxieties. May we unite in deep concern to-night; I will pray for God's blessing upon every one of you, and do you pray earnestly that no word of mine may be unprofitable to you. When preacher and hearer draw the same way the chariot wheels move to music, and that music is salvation. Come, Spirit of the living God, and make it to be so.

Now, I want to take you immediately to the text, and I shall dwell upon two points of it if there should be time. If not, I shall keep to one only. The first is enough to begin with: CHRIST HAS COME THAT THOSE WHO SEE NOT MAY SEE.

It is a very wonderful thing about the gospel that it is meant for people who think themselves most unsuited for it, and most undeserving of it,—it is a sight for those who see not. An anxious friend gave me the other day a description of himself which was enough to make a man stand aghast to hear it. With many sighs and tears, he described to me the condition of a man lost by nature and by practice, and unable to help himself in the least degree. When he had completed his story —I let him finish it, and touch it up with a few extra strokes of black —I took him by the hand, and said, "I am sure that you are one of those whom Christ came into the world to save. You have given me the most accurate description possible of one of God's elect when aroused to see his state by nature before the Most Holy God. You are one of those for whom the gospel was intended." I spoke boldly, for I felt that I was only stating the truth.

Since Jesus Christ came into the world to open men's eyes, I know that he did not come to open the eyes of some of those around me, for they have bright eyes, which smile on me while I am now speaking, and seem to say,—"No oculist is needed here!" I cast my eyes all

round the place, and I see nothing for the great Opener-of-eyes to do till I pause at yonder pew, for there sits a blind man. There are one or two here to-night whose natural eyes have for many years been sealed in darkness; and I say of them, if Jesus Christ has come to open anybody's eyes, he has come to open the eyes of the blind. It must be so. Infirmity and disability are needful preparations for the receipt of the blessing of sight. Suppose I heard that Jesus had come to make lame men leap like a hart. Well, I should look round and say that he did not come for that young girl,—she can skip like a gazelle, and run like a fawn; he did not come for that young man,—I saw him on his bicycle just now, flying over the ground swiftly as a swallow skims the stream. Neither did the healer of the lame come for that strong brother over there, to whom a quick, long walk is quite a pleasure. But just now there limped down yonder aisle a lame man on his crutch. Did you not hear his heavy movement? Well, if Jesus Christ came to heal lameness, that is the kind of person that he had his eye upon.

When I hear of a charity breakfast being distributed, I never imagine for a moment that the select assembly that will be gathered to discuss a meal of porridge and bread will consist of members of the Houses of Lords and Commons, or of the royal family. I do not suppose that one of those honourable confraternities will be present at a festival with beggars, unless they should take a fancy to be lookers-on. If I went to a charity breakfast and saw some of the peerage there with basins and spoons, instead of stars and garters, I should say, "Turn out. You are not the people that ought to be here. You have no right at this entertainment. The richer and the more respectable you are, the less right you have to be sitting at a meal that was meant for the poorest of the poor." Now turn the parable round. If you are blinded in your spiritual sight, Christ came to open your eyes. If you are lame, so that you cannot run to him, Christ came that he might restore you. If you are as poor as spiritual poverty can make you; poorer than that—as poor as sin can make you; and if you are as unable to help yourselves as the dead in the graves, then I remember that great truth, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." It sounds curious, does it not? but it is so; "Christ died for our sins," not for our virtues. It is not your efficiencies, but your deficiencies which entitle you to the Lord Jesus. It is not your wealth, but your want; it is not what you have, but what you have not; it is not what you can boast of, but what you mourn over, that qualifies you to receive the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He came on purpose that those that see not might see. O blind eyes, I have good news for you. O souls that sit in darkness and in the valley of the shadow of death, my feet are beautiful to-night, for I bring you glad tidings of exceeding joy—light for the blind, gladness for the despairing, grace for the guilty.

Now, I want you to consider the blind man of whom we were reading in the narrative just now as *a sort of model blind man*—the kind of blind man that Jesus Christ delights to look upon, and to whom he rejoices to give sight. This blind man *knew that he was blind.* He never had a doubt about that. He had never seen a ray of light, and yet he believed that he was blind,—not quite so easy

a matter as some of you may think, for I have met with thousands of blind men who laugh at the idea of sight because they have had no experience of it, and they refuse to believe more than they can understand or feel. This sightless beggar had to be told that there was such a thing as sight; but being so told he believed it, and all his after experience went to confirm the unhappy fact. Under a full persuasion that it was even so he had taken up the proper position for a poor, blind man; he sat by the wayside, and asked for alms. Now, the man whom Christ delights to bless is the man who knows his right place, and is willing to occupy it. He does not conceal his blindness, and talk as if he carried a telescope about with him, and communed all night with the stars. Many of you unconverted people are a deal too high; you will have to come down a good many notches before you will be in your true places. You are so excellent, are you not? and so intelligent, and so humble, and so well-meaning, and so everything that you ought to be! To you salvation will never come. The spirit of peace will never dwell in a nest which reeks of pride. In your own false judgment you are within an inch of being perfect, whereas the Lord knows that you are not half that distance from hell, if his justice were to be let loose upon you. You dream fine dreams in your fond conceit of yourselves, fancying that you have kept the law from your youth up, and that you are abundantly religious, and excellent, and admirable, and all that you ought to be. As long as you think thus highly of yourselves, the blessing is hindered and kept away. You self-exalting ones are not of the kind that Jesus came to bless. He said himself, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Perhaps some one here is saying, "I do not understand it; I cannot get at this gospel; I scarcely know my own condition. I am unhappy, I know; I am not right, I know; but I cannot describe myself, or see myself aright. As to this faith of which I hear so much, and this atoning blood which seems so mighty to cleanse, I seem as if I could not perceive it or comprehend it. Alas, I am so blind!" You speak the truth, my dear friend, and therein you are like the blind man in the gospel. I pray that as Jesus healed *him*, so he will heal you; and I pray with strong confidence, too, for my Lord has certain fixed ways, and when he meets with certain cases he acts after the same method with them. Jesus is not arbitrary, but he has a way of procedure from which he does not deviate, so that, when he meets such a case as yours, he does the same with each instance of it, to the praise and glory of his name. Take up a blind beggar's position to-night, and sit down and cry for light and healing, and you shall certainly have them.

This blind man not only believed that he was blind and knew it, but *he had a sincere desire to be enlightened.* It was no grief to him that Jesus had come that he might see. It was an intense joy to hear that Jesus had opened the eyes of other blind men; and, though he may have feared that his case was one quite out of the catalogue—for since the world began it was not heard that any man had opened the eyes of one that was born blind—yet he was pleased to find that Jesus Christ had stopped and looked upon him, and was placing clay upon his eyes. He felt a gladness and an alacrity about his heart when he was bidden to go to Siloam and wash: his whole manhood went with the Saviour's

act and deed; he gave himself up to the surgery of the Christ with the full consent of his being.

Now, are you hungering after Christ? Oh, soul, if you know your need of him, and have a strong desire after him, the heavenly work is begun! If there is within your spirit a burning longing to be reconciled to God by the death of his Son, your cure is already half wrought. Some of you have written me letters lately which show the actings of your hearts: these are blind movements enough, but they all grope after light. Poor souls that you are, what hope I have for you! Specially for him who with broken heart has begged our prayers these many months, and yet has not come out to light and liberty. I am so glad to see the strength, and vehemence, and agony of your desires. Your unbelief grieves me, but your eagerness charms me. Would God you would trust my Lord Jesus Christ and rest in him! Still I am glad to think that you cannot rest without him. I am glad that you cannot be quiet till he quiets you. No pillow will ever ease your head but my Lord's bosom. No hand but his can ever stanch your bleeding wounds. I am glad that it is so, for such a sinner as you are is well described by Hart,—

> "A sinner is a sacred thing:
> The Holy Ghost hath made him so."

The Spirit of God has set apart the blind soul to be a monument of the Illuminator's skill: he has made the lost soul to be the choice standing-place whereon Christ may set his foot, and display all the splendour of his love.

This man is, again, a model to every other blind man because *he was very obedient.* As soon as the Lord said to him, "Go, wash," he went. There was no question with him about Siloam; he had no Abana or Pharpar which he preferred to that pool. He was fully submissive. He stood still, you know, and let the Master put the clay on his eyes. It did not look like an operation that could do him any good, but he believed that Jesus was a prophet, and so he waited, and let him do whatever he pleased with him. How glad I am when I can see a poor soul offering a full surrender to Jesus. Some of you heard last Monday night about the sweetness of yielding yourselves up to Jesus: how I wish you might now feel it. You will be more passive than active, a great deal, in the matter of your conversion. He will give you quickness of foot after he has once given you life; but, in the inception of the life, the first thing is just to own your death, and to be willing to receive life altogether from him in his own way. That is a good word in the prophet, "O Lord, thou art the potter, and we are the clay." Now, what can the clay do to help the potter? Nothing; only it must be pliable: it must yield to his hand. The clay must not be stiff, and hard, and unwilling to be moulded, or it will be set aside. O be submissive to the saving hand! When thou art brought into such a state of heart that thou art willing to be anything or nothing so that thou mayest be saved, dear soul, thou art nigh unto the kingdom. If thou canst say, "I would give my life to be saved; or if the Lord refuses anything at my hands, I will gladly consent to be nothing if he will but save me," then thou art on the door-

step of grace. I would so completely yield myself up to Christ as to feel what he would have me feel and nothing more; to be what he would have me be, and to do what he would have me do, and nothing beyond. If thou art thus submissive, I tell thee to take heart of hope. The Spirit of God is at work with thee. Thou art very near to Christ. Believe on him, trust in him; and live, for he has come on purpose that they that see not might see. Catch at that sacred purpose of amazing grace, and let thy despair fly away.

This is our first remark: this blind man becomes our model.

And now notice next, that, *when he sees, this kind of man owns that he does see.* He has been so thoroughly convinced of his blindness that, when he gets his sight, he owns it with glad surprise. To him the newly-given light is such a boon that he is overjoyed with it, and gladly cries, Now I see." Some people do not know whether they are converted or not. I hope that they are saved, but such people are not generally of very much use. We have to spend our time and strength in taking care of them, and comforting them, and enabling them to rise above sheer despair. But the man that has been totally blind, and has known it, when he gets sight is equally sure that he sees. You cannot make such a man doubt the greatness and truthfulness of the change. He comes out and says, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." I delight in clear, sharp-cut conversions! I do not condemn those dear friends who come into light by slow degrees. Far, far, far from it! I delight in them; but still, for usefulness in testimony, and for decision of character, there is nothing like a conversion which is like life from the dead, and like turning from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. The old-fashioned convert is the man for me; he knows something, and holds fast by what he knows; his is experimental knowledge, and you cannot beat it out of him. I like to think of some of you utterly blind people who cannot help yourselves at all; for, when you receive the light, you will know it, and you will not hesitate to come out and say so. In your case the poor preacher will not be robbed of his wages, as he often is, when he saves a soul by God's grace but never hears of it. Neither will the gospel be deprived of its witnesses, nor the church be despoiled of her helpers, nor the Lord be robbed of the revenue of glory which is his due. We expect from you blind folk grand testimonies for Jesus when once the Lord causes you to see.

Again, when the blind man's eyes were opened, *he began to defend the man that opened his eyes.* He did it well, too. He said, "Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes." On he went with arguments which confounded scribe and Pharisee. When the Lord takes a big blind sinner, and washes him, and opens his eyes, then the man will not have Christ spoken against. He will speak up for his Lord and Master; he cannot help it. You will not find him dumb, as some professors are. Why, some of your genteel Christians do not speak for Christ above once in six months, and then it would be better for them to have held their tongues, for they speak so half-heartedly. Here is a man with an open mouth, and he speaks right from his heart under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and is not ashamed to own what the Lord has done for

him. We want many recruits of this sort. The church at the present day wants men and women who are so thoroughly and certainly converted that, when they speak about Christ, they speak positively, and with a power which none can gainsay or resist. I think I hear you poor, darkened, desolate one crying out, "Oh, sir, if the Lord were to save me I would not be ashamed to own it. If he should ever bring me in among his people I will tell them all about it. I will tell the very devils in hell what sovereign grace has done for me." Oh, my poor brother, you are Christ's man! You are the kind of man he delights to bless. You poor, devil-dragged sinners, who are almost at your wits' ends, and would even take away your own lives if it were not a most horrible sin—you are the very ones upon whom the Lord in mercy looks to-night, for he said himself, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Only trust yourselves in his dear hands, and believe that he can, and that he will save you, and you shall be saved; and then I know that you will own his name, defend his truth, glory in his cross, and live to his praise. Those who see not shall be made to see, and then the Lord Jesus shall be the Lord of their hearts, the Master of their lives, and the Beloved of their souls.

The best thing about this man was that, when his eyes were opened, *he wished to know more;* and when Jesus Christ spoke to him, saying, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" he asked, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" When he found that the Son of God was the self-same divine One who had opened his eyes, then we read that at once he worshipped him. Notice that at the end of the thirty-eighth verse: "And he worshipped him." He was no Unitarian. In the man who spake with him he saw the Son of God, and he reverently adored him. If our Lord Jesus had not been God, he would have told the man to rise, and he would have rent his garments in horror at the bare idea of receiving divine worship; instead of which, our Lord instanced this as a proof that the man's eyes were opened, and immediately said that he had come for that very purpose—that those that did not see might see. Friends, if you have not seen Jesus of Nazareth to be "very God of very God," you have seen nothing. You cannot be right in the rest unless you think rightly of him. Until you get to know that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, exalted on high to give repentance and forgiveness of sin, you need still that there should fall from your eyes, as it were, scales; for the light eternal has not come to you. He that once receives the true light from God will know the Lord Jesus, not as a delegated God, or a glorified man, but as God over all, blessed for ever. He will have a God to save him, and nobody else, for who could save us but the Almighty? I would not trust the tenth part of my soul with ten thousand Gabriels; and I could not repose it anywhere but in him that is able to save to the uttermost—even that same God without whom was not anything made that was made.

Thus I have shown you how this model blind man is the very man to whom the Lord Jesus will give sight, because the results that

follow are glorifying to Christ. Are you such a person? Then, be comforted.

But *how is it that such blind men do come clearly to see?* The reason is sovereign grace, but still there are other reasons.

First, there is no conceit in them to hinder Christ. It is not our littleness that hinders Christ; but our bigness. It is not our weakness that hinders Christ; it is our strength. It is not our darkness that hinders Christ; it is our supposed light that holds back his hand. It is easier to save us from our sins than from our righteousnesses. Our self-righteousness is that hideous boa-constrictor which seems to coil itself round and round our spirit, and to crush out of us all the life that would receive the gospel of the grace of God. He that thinks that he knows will never learn. He that is blind and thinks that he sees will remain contented in the darkness all his life long. Now, dear friends, if you are in that state that you know that you are in the dark—a darkness that may be felt—if it seems horribly to cling to you, so that you cannot get rid of it, if you seem unable even to obtain a ray of light, then you are just in the right state to receive the eternal light from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The next reason is that such people as this always refuse to speculate. They want certainties. When a man feels his own blindness and spiritual death, if you discuss before him the fine new nothings of modern theology, he says, "I do not want them: they are of no consequence to me: there is no comfort in them for a lost soul." A poor thief was converted some little time ago, and he was taken to hear a certain preacher who is exceedingly broad in his views. When the reclaimed thief came out, he said to a friend that took him, "If what that man said was true, it would be a fine thing for me, for I could have my full swing, and yet get off easy: but I know that it is a lie, and therefore I do not want to have anything more to do with him or his doctrine. A sinner like me deserves to be damned for ever, and it is no use for anybody to tell me the contrary; therefore I want a Christ that can save me from eternal damnation. If this man's Christ only saves men from the little bit of damnation that he has preached, he is no good to me." That was a very sensible observation. We also need a Saviour from eternal damnation, and we do not care for those little saviours from a little hell which are nowadays so much cried up. We have a lot of sham sinners about, and we have a number of ministers who preach a sham saviour, and a sham salvation; and the sham sinners like to have it so. But if Christ once deals with you—pulls you down to the last course, and digs your foundations up, then you will want a Christ that will begin with you upon no terms but those of free grace, and you will want a power that will work the whole miracle of salvation for you from beginning to end. If you are yourselves utterly without strength, that makes you reachable by the strength of grace. When a man gives up his pretty speculations, and just sticks to the old teaching from the divine word, he wants a great Saviour to save him from a great hell; for he feels himself to be one who has been a great sinner, and greatly deserves the infinite wrath of God. If your salvation should be too big for you, that will be a great deal better than getting one that will be too small for you; yet, if you think that the salvation of Jesus is too great for you, it shows that you are not the man

for whom it is meant. Our fear is that you are one of those that see but will be made blind. If you feel your blindness, and cry out to God about it, you are the man for whom the sight-giving Saviour died.

Again, people who are thoroughly blind are the kind of people that are glad to lean on God. A man that can see a little does not want to borrow guidance from without. He says, "No, no! I do not want it." Take a homely illustration from myself: I used to be very backward in using spectacles for some time, because I could almost see without them, and I did not wish to be an old gentleman too soon. But now that I cannot read my notes at all without wearing spectacles, I put them on without a moment's hesitation, and I do not care whether you think me old or not. So when a man comes to feel thoroughly guilty, he does not mind depending upon God. If you sinners think that you can do a little without God, or can do with just a little help from God, why then you will keep away from the Lord Jesus. But when you come to this, "I must perish if Christ is not everything to me": why, then you *will* have him, for he never refused a soul that came to him in that style.

You may have heard the story of the negro and his master who were both under conviction of sin at the same time. Almost the next evening the negro found joy and peace through believing, but his master was months under conviction. So he said to the negro one day, "Sam, you know we were both pricked to the heart at that meeting, and here are you rejoicing in Christ, and I am still doubting and despairing. What can be the reason of it?" The negro said, "Why, you see, massa, Jesus Christ come along, and bring a fine robe of glorious righteousness, and say to Sambo, 'Here is a robe for you!' I look at myself, and see Sam all rags from head to foot, and I take the robe, and puts it on directly; so glad to have it. Jesus say same thing to massa, but massa say, 'My coat is very respectable. I think I can make it last a little longer. Massa patch up the hole in the elbow, and mend the skirt a little, and he go on with it. Massa's coat too good. If his coat were all in rags, like Sam's, he would not wait, but he would this very day take the glorious robe of righteousness." That is the whole truth of the matter. Some of you are not poor enough to be made rich by Christ.

A man said to me the other day, "Sir, I despair of myself." "Give me your hand," I said; "You are on the right road; but I want you to go a little further. I want you to feel that you are too great a fool even to despair of yourself." When you cry, "I cannot feel my own folly as I should," then I think your folly will be ended. I like to hear a man cry, "I feel unhappy because I cannot feel. I am grieved to think that I cannot grieve. I am in an agony because I cannot get into an agony." You are getting right, my brother. You are the sort of man that God will bless. Now, look away from yourself, agony and all, and just trust in Jesus Christ, who is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. Own your blindness, and you shall find the light come streaming into your eyes. Because you are content and willing to lean wholly upon God, the Lord will guide you into peace and joy. What a mercy it is when we are brought to our last resort, and are compelled to hide in Jesus because we have no other shelter!

"'Tis perfect poverty alone
That sets the soul at large;
While we can call one mite our own,
We get no full discharge.

"But let our debts be what they may,
However great or small,
As soon as we have nought to pay
Our Lord forgives us all."

Once more, our Lord Jesus Christ does delight to work in those who are thoroughly blind in order to give them sight: it is high pleasure, his royal recreation. I know that a true man is never so glad as when he has helped those who want help. The plague and worry of this London life to some of us is that so many apply to us for help who ought never to be helped at all, except by the policeman, and the jailer. They cringe, and fawn, and make up lying stories; and when we say, "We will call upon you to see if it is true," they ask in mighty indignation, "Do you think I am a liar? Don't you believe what I say?" I have had to answer, "No, I do not believe a word of it, or you would gladly give your address that we might enquire into your statements." They do not want to be enquired into: that is their horror, for it spoils their game. They want to get money without work, and they thirst for an opportunity to get drunk at other people's expense. A true man does not like to work among cants and cheats of this kind; it makes him sick and angry; yet many a man has been well pleased to go down to the worst place in "horrible London," and to do good to those who are really poor and helpless. One does not like giving to impostors, but where there is real need the generous heart is pleased to afford aid. Now, you poor soul, you are no impostor; yours is real need. You can say, "A poor beggar? Ah, that I am! Does the Lord want to enquire about me? I beseech him to enquire. Search me, O Lord: try me, and know my heart. I know that thou wilt see no righteousness in me. There is nothing in me upon which I can depend. I am, indeed, a helpless, miserable wretch, unless thine infinite mercy shall come to me." My Lord Jesus Christ rejoices to work among such as you are. He likes blessing the truly necessitous. What a joy there is in that great heart of his when he can save souls on the borders of hell,—when he can stretch out his hand and snatch them like brands from the fire. He knows that you will love him as much as that woman did who had much forgiven, and therefore stood and washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. He takes delight in you that cannot take any delight in yourselves. To you that are dried up and barren he will bring living water. He will open rivers in high places for the thirsty ones, and fountains in the midst of the desert for them that faint.

I have felt a wonderful satisfaction in feeding a poor half-starved dog that had no master, and nothing to eat. How he has looked up with pleasure in my face when he has been fed to the full! Depend upon it, the Lord Jesus Christ will take delight in feeding a poor hungry sinner. You feel like a poor dog, do you not? Then Jesus cares for you. He does not care about kings and princes, and those great people whose grandeur dazzles beholders, but he cares about poor sinners. If you are

nothing, Christ loves you, and he will be everything to you. If you will but come to him, just as you are, with no plea of any kind except your urgent necessity, and your dread of the wrath of God, you may come, and be sure of a welcome.

One said to me this week, "I am afraid to come to God, for I believe that I am only driven to him by the mean motive of fear." "Ah," I I replied, "it was the devil who told you that; because in the eleventh of Hebrews, among the first of the great heroes of faith we read that Noah, being moved with fear, built an ark for the saving of his house." Fear is not a mean motive; it is a very proper motive for a guilty man to feel. Where else can such poor sinners as we are begin, except with selfish fear? Do not judge yourself about that; the prodigal went home because he was hungry, yet his father did not refuse him admittance. As to its being mean to fear, it would be meaner still to defy your God. You ought not to say, "It is too mean a motive." Why, what but a mean motive can be expected from such a mean wretch as you are? A boy has been rebelling against his father, and he has left his home in high passion, swearing that he will never go back. His father sends him a letter, and says, "Return, everything is for given: only confess your fault, and I will restore you to the family, and treat you as lovingly as ever." The boy reads this letter, and he says, "It is very kind of my father; I think I will go home;" but a wicked companion says, "Then you are going to eat humble-pie. It will be very mean of you after all you have said about fighting this matter through. Are you going to knuckle under to your father?" Why, it is the very devil tempting the boy, is it not? And so it was the devil who whispered to my friend that it would be to turn to the Lord through fear. Fear is a blessed thing;—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and even slavish fear of God is a great deal better thing than presumption.

Oh, you poor blind one, look to Christ, and live! I was about to say, "Ye dead ones, come;" and I do say it, for God saith it,—"Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." "What is the use of talking thus to dead people?" says one. My dear friends, I do not suppose that it would be of any use for you to do so, because, you see, you were never sent on such an errand; but I am as much sent to preach to the dry bones to-night as Ezekiel was when he stood in the valley and said, "Ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." In the name of the eternal God, I say, "Ye guilty sinners, fly to Christ, and live." Come along with you, you who are the very worst in your own esteem—you who are all but in hell. The Lord saith, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." He will not cast you away, but he will receive you now. God grant that you may come, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John ix.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—257, 602, 603.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

"THOUGH HE WERE DEAD."

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 14TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"—John xi. 24—26.

MARTHA is a very accurate type of a class of anxious believers. They do believe truly, but not with such confidence as to lay aside their care. They do not distrust the Lord, or question the truth of what he says, yet they puzzle their brain about "How shall this thing be?" and so they miss the major part of the present comfort which the word of the Lord would minister to their hearts if they received it more simply. *How?* and *why?* belong unto the Lord. It is his business to arrange matters so as to fulfil his own promises. If we would sit at our Lord's feet with Mary, and consider what he has promised, we should choose a better part than if we ran about with Martha, crying, "How can these things be?"

Martha, you see, in this case, when the Lord Jesus Christ told her that her brother would rise again, replied, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." She was a type, I say, of certain anxious believers, for she *set a practical bound to the Saviour's words*. "Of course there will be a resurrection, and then my brother will rise with the rest." She concluded that the Saviour could not mean anything beyond that. The first meaning and the commonest meaning that suggests itself to her must be what Jesus means. Is not that the way with many of us? We had a statesman once, and a good man too, who loved reform; but whenever he had accomplished a little progress, he considered that all was done. We called him at last "Finality John," for he was always coming to an ultimatum, and taking for his motto "Rest, and be thankful." Into that style Christian people too frequently drop with regard to the promises of God. We limit the Holy One of Israel as to the meaning of his words. Of course they mean so much, but we cannot allow that they intend more. It were well if the spirit of progress would enter into our faith, so that we felt within our souls that we had never beheld the innermost glory of the Lord's words of grace. We often wonder that the disciples put such poor

meanings upon our Lord's words, but I fear we are almost as far off as they were from fully comprehending all his gracious teachings. Are we not still as little children, making little out of great words? Have we grasped as yet a tithe of our Lord's full meaning, in many of his sayings of love? When he is talking of bright and sparkling gems of benediction, we are thinking of common pebble-stones in the brook of mercy; when he speaketh of stars and heavenly crowns, we think of sparks and childish coronals of fading flowers. Oh that we could but have our intellect cleared; better still, could have our understanding expanded, or, best of all, our faith increased, so as to reach to the height of our Lord's great arguments of love!

Martha also had another fault in which she was very like ourselves: she *laid the words of Jesus on the shelf*, as things so trite and sure that they were of small practical importance. "Thy brother shall rise again." Now, if she had possessed faith enough, she might truthfully have said, "Lord, I thank thee for that word! I expect within a short space to see him sitting at the table with thee. I put the best meaning possible upon thy words, for I know that thou art always better than I can think thee to be; and therefore I expect to see my beloved Lazarus walk home from the sepulchre before the sun sets again." But no, she lays the truth aside as a matter past all dispute, and says, "I know that my brother shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." A great many precious truths are laid up by us like the old hulks in the Medway, never to see service any more, or like aged pensioners at Chelsea, as relics of the past. We say "Yes, quite true, we fully believe that doctrine." Somehow it is almost as bad to lay up a doctrine in lavender as it is to throw it out of window. When you so believe a truth as to put it to bed and smother it with the bolster of neglect, it is much the same as if you did not believe it at all. An official belief is very much akin to infidelity. Some persons never question a doctrine: that is not their line of temptation; they accept the gospel as true, but then they never expect to see its promises practically carried out; it is a proper thing to believe, but by no means a prominent, practical factor in actual life. It is true but it is mysterious, misty, mythical, far removed from the realm of practical common sense. We do with the promises often as a poor old couple did with a precious document, which might have cheered their old age had they used it according to its real value. A gentleman stepping into a poor woman's house saw framed and glazed upon the wall a French note for a thousand francs. He said to the old folks, "How came you by this?" They informed him that a poor French soldier had been taken in by them and nursed until he died, and he had given them that little picture when he was dying as a memorial of him. They thought it such a pretty souvenir that they had framed it, and there it was adorning the cottage wall. They were greatly surprised when they were told that it was worth a sum which would be quite a little fortune for them if they would but turn it into money. Are we not equally unpractical with far more precious things? Have you not certain of the words of your great Lord framed and glazed in your hearts, and do you not say to yourselves, "They are so sweet and precious"? and yet you have never turned them into actual blessing—never used them in the hour of need. You have done as Martha did when she took the

words, "Thy brother shall rise again," and put round about them this handsome frame, "in the resurrection at the last day." Oh that we had grace to turn God's bullion of gospel into current coin, and use them as our present spending money.

Moreover, Martha made another blunder, and that was *setting the promise in the remote distance.* This is a common folly, this distancing the promises of the Most High. "In the resurrection at the last day" —no doubt she thought it a very long way off, and therefore she did not get much comfort out of it. Telescopes are meant to bring objects near to the eye, but I have known people use the mental telescope in the wrong way: they always put the big end of it to their eye, and then the glass sends the object further away. Her brother was to be raised that very day: she might so have understood the Saviour, but instead of it she looked at his words through the wrong end of the glass, and said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Brethren, do not refuse the present blessing. Death and heaven, or the advent and the glory, are at your doors. A little while and he that will come shall come, and will not tarry. Think not that the Lord is slack concerning his promise. Do not say in your heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming"; or dream that his words of love are only for the dim future. In the ages to come marvels shall be revealed, but even the present hour is bejewelled with loving-kindness. To-day the Lord has rest, and peace, and joy to give to you. Lose not these treasures by unbelief.

Martha also appears to me to have *made the promise unreal and impersonal.* "Thy brother shall rise again": to have realised that would have been a great comfort to her, but she mixes Lazarus up with all the rest of the dead. "Yes, he will rise in the resurrection at the last day; when thousands of millions shall be rising from their graves, no doubt Lazarus will rise with the rest." That is the way with us; we take the promise and say, "This is true to all the children of God." If so it is true to us; but we miss *that* point. What a blessing God has bestowed upon the covenanted people! Yes, and you are one of them: but you shake your head, as if the word was not for you. It is a fine feast, and yet you are hungry; it is a full and flowing stream, but you remain thirsty. Why is this? Somehow the generality of your apprehension misses the sweetness which comes of personal appropriation. There is such a thing as speaking of the promises in a magnificent style, and yet being in deep spiritual poverty; as if a man should boast of the wealth of old England, and the vast amount of treasure in the Bank, while he does not possess a penny wherewith to bless himself. In your case you know it is your own fault that you are poor and miserable, for if you would but exercise an appropriating faith you might possess a boundless heritage. If you are a child of God all things are yours, and you may help yourself. If you are hungry at this banquet it is for want of faith: if you are thirsty by the brink of this river it is because you do not stoop down and drink. Behold, God is your portion: the Father is your shepherd, the Son of God is your food, and the Spirit of God is your comforter. Rejoice and be glad, and grasp with the firm hand of a personal faith that royal boon which Jesus sets before you in his promises.

I beg you to observe how the Lord Jesus Christ in great wisdom dealt with Martha. In the first place, he did not grow angry with her. There is not a trace of petula-ce in his speech. He did not say to her, "Martha, I am ashamed of you that you should have such low thoughts of me." She thought that she was honouring Jesus when she said,—"I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." Her idea of Jesus was that he was a great prophet who would ask of God and obtain answers to his prayers; she has not grasped the truth of his own personal power to give and sustain life. But the Saviour did not say, "Martha, these are low and grovelling ideas of your Lord and Saviour." He did not chide her, though she lacked wisdom,—wisdom which she ought to have possessed. I do not think God's people learn much by being scolded; it is not the habit of the great Lord to scold his disciples, and therefore they do not take it well when his servants take upon themselves to rate them. If ever you meet with one of the Lord's own who falls far short of the true ideal of the gospel, do not bluster and upbraid. Who taught you what you know? He that has taught you did it of his infinite love and grace and pity, and he was very tender with you, for you were doltish enough; therefore be tender with others, and give them line upon line, even as your Lord was gentle towards you. It ill becomes a servant to lose patience where his Master shows so much.

The Lord Jesus, with gentle spirit, proceeded to teach her more of the things concerning himself. More of Jesus! More of Jesus! That is the sovereign cure for our faults. He revealed himself to her, that in him she might behold reasons for a clearer hope and a more substantial faith. How sweetly fell those words upon her ear: "I am the resurrection and the life"! Not "I can get resurrection by my prayers," but "I am, myself, the resurrection." God's people need to know more of what Jesus is, more of the fulness which it has pleased the Father to place in him. Some of them know quite enough of what they are themselves, and they will break their hearts if they go on reading much longer in that black-letter book: they need, I say, to rest their eyes upon the person of their Lord, and to spy out all the riches of grace which lie hidden in him; then they will pluck up courage, and look forward with surer expectancy. When our Lord said, "I am the resurrection and the life," he indicated to Martha that resurrection and life were not gifts which he must seek, nor even boons which he must create; but that he himself was the resurrection and the life: these things were wherever he was. He was the author, and giver, and maintainer of life, and that life was himself. He would have her to know that he was himself precisely what she wanted for her brother. She did know a little of the Lord's power, for she said, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," which being very kindly interpreted might mean, "Lord, thou art the life." "Ah, but," saith Jesus, "you must also learn that I am the resurrection! You already admit that if I had been here Lazarus would not have died; I would have you further learn that I being here your brother shall live though he has died; and that when I am with my people none of them shall die for ever, for I am to them the resurrection and the life." Poor Martha was looking up into the sky for life, or gazing down into the deeps for resurrection, when the Resurrection and the

Life stood before her, smiling upon her, and cheering her heavy heart. She had thought of what Jesus might have done if he had been there before; now let her know what he *is* at the present moment.

Thus I have introduced the text to you, and I pray God the Holy Spirit to bless these prefatory observations; for if we learn only these first lessons we shall not have been here in vain. Let us construe promises in their largest sense, let us regard them as real, and set them down as facts. Let us look to the Promiser, even to Jesus the Lord, and not so much to the difficulties which surround the accomplishment of the promise. In beginning the divine life let us look to Jesus, and in afterwards running the heavenly race let us still be looking unto Jesus, till we see in him our all in all. When both eyes look on Jesus we are in the light; but when we have one eye for him, and one eye for self, all is darkness. Oh, to see him with all our soul's eyes!

Now, I am going to speak as I am helped of the Spirit; and I shall proceed thus—first, by asking you to *view the text as a stream of comfort to Martha and other bereaved persons;* and, secondly, to *view it as a great deep of comfort to all believers.*

I. First, I long for you to VIEW THE TEXT AS A STREAM OF COMFORT TO MARTHA AND OTHER BEREAVED PERSONS.

Observe, in the beginning, that *the presence of Jesus Christ means life and resurrection.* It meant that to Lazarus. If Jesus comes to Lazarus, Lazarus must live. Had Martha taken the Saviour's words literally, as she should have done, as I have already told you, she would have had immediate comfort from them; and the Saviour intended her to understand them in that sense. He virtually says, "I am to Lazarus the Power that can make him live again; and I am the Power that can keep him in life. Yea, I am the resurrection and the life." A statement so understood would have been very comfortable to her. Nothing could have been more so. It would there and then have abolished death so far as her brother was concerned. Somebody says, "But I do not see that this is any comfort *to us,* for if Jesus be here, yet it is only a spiritual presence, and we cannot expect to see our dear mother, or child, or husband raised from the dead thereby." I answer that our Lord Jesus is able at this moment to give us back our departed ones, for he is still the resurrection and the life. But let me ask you whether you really wish that Jesus would raise your departed ones from the dead. You say at first, "Of course I do wish it"; but I would ask you to reconsider that decision; for I believe that upon further thought you will say, "No, I could not wish it." Do you really desire to see your glorified husband sent back again to this world of care and pain? Would you have your father or mother deprived of the glories which they are now enjoying in order that they might help you in the struggles of this mortal life? Would you discrown the saints? You are not so cruel. That dear child, would you have it back from among the angels, and from the inner glory, to come here and suffer again? You would not have it so. And to my mind it is a comfort to you, or should be, that it is not within your power to have it so; because you might be tempted in some selfish moment to accept the doubtful boon. Lazarus could return, and fit into his place again, but scarcely one in ten thousand could do so. There would be serious drawbacks in the return of those whom we have loved best. Do you cry,

"Give back my father! Give me back my friend"? You know not what you ask. It might be a cause of regret to you as long as they lingered here, for you would each morning think to yourself, "Beloved one, I have brought you out of heaven by my wish. I have robbed you of infinite felicity to gratify myself." For my own part, I had rather that the Lord Jesus should keep the keys of death than that he should lend them to me. It would be too dreadful a privilege to be empowered to rob heaven of the perfected merely to give pleasure to imperfect ones below. Jesus would raise them now if he knew it to be right; I do not wish to take the government from his shoulder. It is more comfortable to me to think that Jesus Christ could give them back to me, and would if it were for his glory and my good. My dear ones that lie asleep could be awakened in an instant if the Master thought it best; but it would not be best, and therefore even I would hold his skirt, and say, "Tread softly, Master! Do not arouse them! I shall go to them, but they shall not return to me. It is not my wish they should return: it is better that they should be with thee where thou art, to behold thy glory." It does not seem to me, then, dear friend, that you are one whit behind Martha; and you ought to be comforted while Jesus says to you, "I am even now the resurrection and the life."

Furthermore, here is comfort which we may each one safely take, namely, that *when Jesus comes the dead shall live.* The Revised Version has it, "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live." We do not know when our Lord will descend from heaven, but we do know the message of the angel, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." The Lord will come; we may not question the certainty of his appearing. When he cometh, all his redeemed shall live with him. The trump of the archangel shall startle the happy sleepers, and they shall wake to put on their beauteous array; the body transformed and made like unto Christ's glorious body shall be once more wrapt about them as the vesture of their perfected and emancipated spirits. Then our brother shall rise again, and all our dear ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus the Lord will bring with him. This is the glorious hope of the church, wherein we see the death of death, and the destruction of the grave. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Then we are also told that *when Jesus comes, living believers shall not die.* After the coming of Christ there shall be no more death for his people. What does Paul say? "Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all *die,* but we shall all be changed." Did I see a little schoolgirl put up her finger? Did I hear her say, "Please, sir, you made a mistake." So I did; I made it on purpose. Paul did not say, "We shall not all *die,*" for the Lord had already said, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never *die*"; so Paul would not say that any of us should die, but he used his Master's own term, and said, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." When the Lord comes there will be no more death; we who are alive and remain (as some of us may be—we cannot tell) will undergo a sudden transformation—for flesh and blood, as they are, cannot inherit the kingdom of God—and by that transformation our bodies shall be made meet to be "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." There shall be no more death

then. Here, then, we have two sacred handkerchiefs with which to wipe the eyes of mourners: when Christ cometh the dead shall live; when Christ cometh those that live shall never die. Like Enoch, or Elias, we shall pass into the glory state without wading through the black stream, while those who have already forded it shall prove to have been no losers thereby. All this is in connection with Jesus. Resurrection with Jesus is resurrection indeed. Life in Jesus is life indeed. It endears to us resurrection, glory, eternal life, and ultimate perfection, when we see them all coming to us in Jesus. He is the golden pot which hath this manna, the rod which beareth these almonds, the life whereby we live.

But further, I have not made you drink deep enough of this stream yet,—I think our Saviour meant that *even now his dead are alive.* "He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live." Those that believe in Jesus Christ appear to die, but yet they live. They are not in the grave, they are for ever with the Lord. They are not unconscious, they are with their Lord in Paradise. Death cannot kill a believer, it can only usher him into a freer form of life. Because Jesus lives, his people live. God is not the God of the dead but of the living: those who have departed have not perished. We laid the precious body in the cemetery, and we set up stones at the head and foot; but we might engrave on them the Lord's words, "She is not dead, but sleepeth." True, an unbelieving generation may laugh us to scorn, but we scorn their laughing.

Again, *even now his living do not die.* There is an essential difference between the decease of the godly and the death of the ungodly. Death comes to the ungodly man as a penal infliction, but to the righteous as a summons to his Father's palace: to the sinner it is an execution, to the saint an undressing. Death to the wicked is the King of terrors: death to the saint is the end of terrors, the commencement of glory. To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing. Death is ours; it is set down in the list of our possessions among the all things, and it follows life in the list as if it were an equal favour. No longer is it death to die. The name remains, but the thing itself is changed. Wherefore, then, are we in bondage through fear of death? Why do we dread the process which gives us liberty? I am told that persons who in the cruel ages had lain in prison for years suffered much more in the moment of the knocking off of their fetters than they had endured for months in wearing the hard iron; and yet I suppose that no man languishing in a dungeon would have been unwilling to stretch out his arm or leg, that the heavy chains might be beaten off by the smith. We should all be content to endure that little inconvenience to obtain lasting liberty. Now, such is death—the knocking off of the fetters; yet the iron may never seem to be so truly iron as when that last liberating blow of grace is about to fall. Let us not mind the harsh grating of the key as it turns in the lock; if we understand it aright it will be as music to our ears. Imagine that your last hour is come! The key turns with pain for a moment; but, lo, the bolt is shot! The iron gate is open! The spirit is free! Glory be unto the Lord for ever and ever!

II. I leave the text now as a stream of comfort for the bereaved, for I wish you to VIEW IT AS A GREAT DEEP OF COMFORT FOR ALL BE-

LIEVERS. I cannot fathom it, any more than I could measure the abyss, but I can invite you to survey it by the help of the Holy Ghost.

Methinks, first, this text plainly teaches that *the Lord Jesus Christ is the life of his people.* We are dead by nature, and you can never produce life out of death: the essential elements are wanting. Should a spark be lingering among the ashes, you may yet fan it to a flame; but from human nature the last spark of heavenly life is gone, and it is vain to seek for life among the dead. The life of every Christian is Christ. He is the beginning of life, being the Resurrection: when he comes to us we live. Regeneration is the result of contact with Christ: we are begotten again unto living hope by his resurrection from the dead. The life of the Christian in its commencement is in Christ alone; not a fragment of it is from himself, and the continuance of that life is equally the same; Jesus is not only the resurrection to begin with, but the life to go on with. "I have life in myself," saith one. I answer—not otherwise than as you are one with Christ: your spiritual life in every breath it draws is in Christ. If you are regarded for a moment as separated from Christ, you are cast forth as a branch and are withered. A member severed from the head is dead flesh and no more. In union to Christ is your life. Oh that our hearers would understand this! I see a poor sinner look into himself, and look again, and then cry, "I cannot see any life within!" Of course you cannot; you have no life of your own. "Alas," cries a Christian, "I cannot find anything within to feed my soul with!" Do you expect to feed upon yourself? Must not Israel look up for the manna? Did one of all the tribes find it in his own bosom? To look to self is to turn to a broken cistern which can hold no water. I tell you you must learn that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Hearken to that great "I"—that infinite EGO! This must cover over and swallow up your little *ego*. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." What are you? Less than nothing, and vanity; but over all springs up that divine, all-sufficient personality, "I am the resurrection and the life." Take the two first words together, and they seem to me to have a wondrous majesty about them—"I AM!" Here is Self-Existence. Life in himself! Even as the Mediator, the Lord Jesus tells us that it is given him to have life in himself, even as the Father hath life in himself (John v. 26). *I am* fills the yawning mouth of the sepulchre. He that liveth and was dead and is alive for evermore, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, declares, "*I am* the resurrection and the life." If, then, I want to live unto God, I must have Christ; and if I desire to continue to live unto God I must continue to have Christ; and if I aspire to have that life developed to the utmost fulness of which it is capable, I must find it all in Christ. He has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly. Anything that is beyond the circle of Christ is death. If I conjure up an experience over which I foolishly dote, which puffs me up as so perfect that I need not come to Christ now as a poor empty-handed sinner, I have entered into the realm of death, I have introduced into my soul a damning leaven. Away with it! Away with it! Everything of life is put into this golden casket of Christ Jesus: all else is death. We have not a breath of life anywhere but in Jesus, who ever liveth to

give life. He saith, "Because I live, ye shall live also," and this is true. We live not for any other reason—not because of anything in us or connected with us, but only because of Jesus. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Now, further, in this great deep to which we would conduct you, *faith is the only channel by which we can draw from Jesus our life.* "I am the resurrection, and the life: *he that believeth in me*": that is it. He does not say, "He that loves me," though love is a bright grace, and very sweet to God: he does not say, "He that serves me," though every one that believes in Christ will endeavour to serve him; but it is not put so: he does not even say, "He that imitates me," though every one that believes in Christ must and will imitate him; but it is put, "He that believeth in me." Why is that? Why doth the Lord so continually make faith to be the only link between himself and the soul? I take it, because faith is a grace which arrogates nothing to itself, and has no operation apart from Jesus, to whom it unites us. You want to conduct the electric fluid, and, in order to this, you find a metal which will not create any action of its own; if it did so, it would disturb the current which you wish to send along it. If it set up an action of its own, how would you know the difference between what came of the metal and what came of the battery? Now, faith is an empty-handed receiver and communicator; it is nothing apart from that upon which it relies, and therefore it is suitable to be a conductor for grace. When an auditorium has to be erected for a speaker in which he may be plainly heard, the essential thing is to get rid of all echo. When you have no echo, then you have a perfect building: faith makes no noise of its own, it allows the Word to speak. Faith cries, "*Non nobis Domine!* Not unto us! Not unto us." Christ puts his crown on faith's head, exclaiming, "Thy faith hath saved thee;" but faith hastens to ascribe all the glory of salvation to Jesus only. So you see why the Lord selects faith rather than any other grace, because it is a self-forgetting thing. It is best adapted to be the tubing through which the water of life runs, because it will not communicate a flavour of its own, but will just convey the stream purely and simply from Christ to the soul. "He that believeth in me."

Now notice, *to the reception of Christ by faith there is no limit.* "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever"—I am deeply in love with that word "whosoever." It is a splendid word. A person who kept many animals had some great dogs and some little ones, and in his eagerness to let them enter his house freely he had two holes cut in the door, one for the big dogs and another for the little dogs. You may well laugh, for the little dogs could surely have come in wherever there was room for the larger ones. This "whosoever" is the great opening, suitable for sinners of every size. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Has any man a right to believe in Christ? The gospel gives every creature the right to believe in Christ, for we are bidden to preach it to every creature, with this command, "Hear, and your soul shall live." Every man has a right to believe in Christ, because he will be damned if he does not, and he must have a right to do that which will bring him into condemnation if he does it not. It is written, "He that believeth and

is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," and that makes it clear that I, whoever I may be, as I have a right to endeavour to escape from damnation, have a right to avail myself of the blessed command, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and live." Oh that "whosoever," that hole in the door for the big dog! Do not forget it! Come along with you, and put your trust in Christ. If you can only get linked with Christ you are a living man; if but a finger touches his garment's hem you are made whole. Only the touch of faith, and the virtue flows from him to you, and he is to you the resurrection and the life.

I desire you to notice that *there is no limit to this power.* Before I was ill this time, and even since, I have had to deal with such a swarm of despairing sinners, that if I have not pulled them up they have pulled me down. I have been trying to speak very large words for Christ when I have met with those disconsolate ones. I hear one say, "How far can Christ be life to a sinner? I feel myself to be utterly wrong, I am altogether wrong; there is nothing right about me: though I have eyes I cannot see, though I have ears I do not hear; if I have a hand I cannot use it, if I have a foot I cannot run with it—I seem altogether wrong." Yes, but if you believe in Christ, though you were still more wrong—that is to say, though you were dead, which is the wrongest state in which a man's body can be,—though you were dead yet shall you live. You look at the spiritual thermometer, and you say, "How low will the grace of God go? will it descend to summer heat? will it touch the freezing point? will it go to zero?" Yes, it will go below the lowest conceivable point,—lower than any instrument can indicate: it will go below the zero of death. If you believe in Jesus, though you are not only wrong, but dead, yet shall you live.

But, says another, "I feel so weak. I cannot understand, I cannot lay hold of things; I cannot pray. I cannot do anything. All I can do is feebly to trust in Jesus." All right! Though you had gone further than that, and were so weak as to be dead, yet should you live. Though the weakness had turned to a dire paralysis, that left you altogether without strength, yet it is written, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "Oh, Sir," says one, "I am so unfeeling." Mark you, these generally are the most feeling people in the world. "I am sorry every day because I cannot be sorry for my sin"—that is the way they talk; it is very absurd, but still very real to them. "Oh," cries one, "the earth shook, the sun was darkened, the rocks rent, the very dead came out of their graves at the death of Christ.

> 'Of feeling all things show some sign
> But this unfeeling heart of mine.'"

Yet if thou believest, unfeeling as thou art, thou livest; for if thou wert gone further than numbness to deadness, yet if thou believest in him thou shalt live.

But the poor creature fetches a sigh, and cries, "Sir, it is not only that I have no feeling, but I am become objectionable and obnoxious to everybody. I am a weariness to myself and to others. I am sure when I come to tell you my troubles you must wish me at Jericho, or some-

where else far away." Now, I admit that such a thought *has* occurred to us sometimes when we have been very busy, and some poor soul has grown prosy with rehearsing his seven-times-repeated miseries; but if you were to get more wearisome still, if you were to become so bad that people would as soon see a corpse as see you, yet remember Jesus says, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Ay, if you went so far as to go in and out among men like an unquiet ghost, so that everybody got out of your way, it would not put you beyond the promise, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

"Oh, sir, I have no hope; my case is quite hopeless!" Very well; but if you had got beyond that, so that you were dead, and could not even know you had no hope, yet if you believed in him you should live. "Oh, but I have tried everything, and there is nothing more for me to attempt. I have read books, I have spoken to Christians, and I am nothing bettered." No doubt it is quite so; but if you had even passed beyond that stage, so that you could not try anything more, yet if you did believe in Jesus you should live. Oh, the blessed power of faith! Nay, rather say the matchless power of him who is the resurrection and the life; for though the poor believer were dead, yet shall he live! Glory be to the Lord who works so wonderfully.

To conclude, if you once do believe in Christ, and come to live, there is this sweet reflection for you, "*Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.*" Our Arminian friends say that you may be a child of God to-day and a child of the devil to-morrow. Write out that statement, and place at the bottom of it the name "*Arminius,*" and then put the scrap of paper into the fire: it is the best thing you can do with it, for there is no truth in it. Jesus says, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Here is a very literal translation—"And every one who lives and believes on me, in no wise shall die for ever." This is from "The Englishman's Greek New Testament," and nothing can be better. The believer may pass through the natural change called death, as far as his body is concerned; but as for his soul it cannot die, for it is written, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life." "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." These are not "ifs" and "buts," and faint hopes; but they are dead certainties, nay, living certainties, out of the mouth of the living Lord himself. You get the life of God in your soul, and you shall never die. "Do you mean that I may do as I like, and live in sin?" No, man, I mean nothing of the sort; what right have you to impute such teaching as that to me? I mean that you shall not love sin and live in it, for that is death; but you shall live unto God. Your likes shall be so radically changed that you shall abhor evil all your days, and long to be holy as God is holy; and you shall be kept from transgression, and shall not go back to wallow in sin. If in some evil hour you backslide, yet shall you be restored; and the main current of your life shall be from the hour of your regeneration towards God, and holiness, and heaven. The angels that rejoiced over you when you repented made

no mistake; they shall go on to rejoice till they welcome you amidst the everlasting songs and Hallelujahs of the blessed at the right hand of God. Believest thou this? Come, poor soul, believest thou this? Who are you? That does not matter, you can get into the "whosoever." That ark will hold all God's Noahs. What have you done? One said to me the other day, "I should like to tell you some of my sins!" I answered quickly, "I would like you would not; I have enough of my own without being infected with yours." What is any man that he should have the filth of another man's drains poured into his ear? No, no: confess to God, but not to man unless you have wronged him, and confession of the wrong is due to him.

"Ah," saith one, "you don't know what I am." No, and I don't want to know what you are; but if you are so far gone that there seems to be not even a ghost of a shade of a shadow of a hope anywhere about you, yet if you believe in Jesus you shall live. Trust the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is worthy to be trusted. Throw yourself upon him, and he will carry you in his bosom. Cast your whole weight upon his atonement; it will bear the strain. Hang on him as the vessel hangs on the nail, and seek no other support. Depend upon Christ with all your might just as you now are, and as the Lord liveth you shall live, and as Christ reigneth you shall reign over sin, and as Christ cometh to glory you shall partake of that glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xi. 1—27.

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HEAVEN BELOW.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 21ST, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters."—Revelations vii. 16, 17.

LET us think of this felicity, that we may be comforted in the prospect of it. All this is already enjoyed by tens of thousands of the redeemed. Some of those who were very dear to us on earth, whose faith we desire to follow, are now for ever with the Lord, and this is their joyful portion—"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." Our comfort lies in the sweet reflection that we are journeying to this goodly land. This divine inheritance is ours: we have the seal of the Holy Spirit upon our title-deeds; we have tasted of the grapes of its Eshcol; we already rejoice in the light and warmth of its celestial city to which we draw near. In a little time we shall be actually within the gate of pearl, and shall know in an instant infinitely more of its glory than an apostle could teach us here below. We are like to one who hath in his hand the guide-book of a country to which he is journeying; he finds in it fair pictures of the scenery of the land and the architecture of the cities, and as he reads each page he says to himself, "I am going there! This is what I shall soon behold!" It would be a wretched thing to have such a book in one's hand and to be entering upon a life-long banishment from home and the home-country. Then should we have to say, "This was my country once, but I shall never see it again. Fair are its skies and lovely are its vales, but mine eye shall ache in vain to gaze upon them. I am exiled for ever from my own dear land!" It is not so with us who are believers in Christ: our faces are towards Immanuel's land, the land which floweth with milk and honey, and we have a portion among the blessed; a mansion is being made ready for each one of us, and we have this promise: "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." Rejoice, then, beloved, for if your portion on earth be slender, if your condition here be sorrowful, if your trials multiply, if your strength declines, yet it is but a

little while and he that will come shall come, and shall not tarry. Well doth our hymn tell us that—

"An hour with our Lord will make up for it all."

We shall forget the pains of a long life in one half-hour of the vision of the Well-beloved. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. Look before you. It is brightness beyond though it be darkness here. Anticipate your sure reward, it cometh with all speed. I speak but sober truth; it seems but a day's journey from this spot to the heavenly highlands. It is so little a while since I was a boy, and yet in less space I shall be with God. It seems but a few days to you who are aged people since you climbed your mother's knee, and yet in far less time you will behold the face of your soul's Bridegroom. Then all trouble will be ended, and eternal joy will crown your head.

But I want you to do this morning, and by God's grace I think we shall accomplish it, a little more than receive comfort. I long that we may "sit together in the heavenlies" even now. It seems to me that this world, if Christians lived as they should do, would become a nether heaven. The true Christian life, when we live near to God, is the rough draft of the life of full communion above. We have seen the artist make with his pencil, or with his charcoal, a bare outline of his picture. It is nothing more, but still one could guess what the finished picture will be from the sketch before you. One acquainted with the artist could see upon the canvas all the splendour of colour peeping through the dark lines of the pencil. Now, I want you to-day to see "the patterns of things in the heavens." We have much of heaven here; at any rate, we have the Lamb who is the glory of the eternal city; we have the presence of him that sits upon the throne among us even now; we have if not the perfect holiness of heaven, yet a justification quite as complete as that of the glorified; we have the "white robes," for "the blood of the Lamb" has washed them even now; and if we have not yet the palm branches of final victory, yet, thanks be to God, we are led in triumph in every place, and even now "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Therefore—

"I would begin the music here,
And so my soul should rise;
Oh, for some heavenly notes to bear
My passions to the skies."

Our voices are not clear as yet, they are half-choked with the fogs and smoke of earth. They will be perfectly attuned ere long; at any rate, let us go over the notes, and if we cannot reach to the full melody of the heavenly music, yet let us run up and down the scale, and try some easy passages. Come, let us worship, and adore, and rejoice as our departed ones are doing, and thus enjoy some of "the days of heaven upon the earth." That shall be my drift this morning, as the Holy Spirit shall instruct me.

I. Keeping to the text, however, I want to speak, first, of THE PERFECTION OF THE PROVISION which is enjoyed in heaven—"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." This is the perfection of the provision.

I must, by your permission, go a little further back to make my

description of this provision more complete. Notice the last sentence of the fifteenth verse: "He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." In the reading we interpreted according to the Revised Version, which gives a more correct rendering: "He that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them." The glorified dwell under the shadow of God. It is for this reason that "the sun shall not light on them, nor any heat," because *they dwell in God.* Oh, what a dwelling-place that will be! You and I are often like Noah's dove, sent out flying over a weary waste, and finding no rest to the sole of our foot; but they dwell in the ark for ever. We go in and out and find pasture, but in that going in and out we are sometimes troubled; up yonder they "go no more out for ever," but eternally behold the face of the King, and for ever dwell at God's right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore. Oh what a joy this must be in heaven, to be always within the circle of the eternal presence, which is always seen, always unclouded, always enjoyed! Such a dwelling means transformation, for none can dwell with God but those who are like him, free from sin, and perfect in holiness. We cannot abide in God for ever unless we are like him, and this in itself is boundless bliss. The abiding in the outspread pavilion of Jehovah will certify a similarity of sanctity and purity between the redeemed and the great Father who becomes their dwelling-place. The Lord shall tabernacle over his glorified people: he shall be their eternal home.

Next we are assured that they shall have *all their necessities prevented.* "They shall hunger no more." To be supplied when we hunger is the mercy of earth: never to hunger at all is the plenitude of heaven. God shall so fill the souls of his redeemed that they shall have no longings: their longings shall be prevented by their constant satisfaction. That which they enjoy will be more than they ever desired to enjoy, or ever imagined that they could be capable of enjoying. Imagination's utmost height never reached to the exceeding bliss and glory of the world to come. The saints confess in the glory that it never entered into their hearts to guess what God had prepared for them that love him. Heaven shall exceed all the desires of God's people; they shall not, even with their enlarged capacities, be able to wish for anything which they do not already possess; so that they shall hunger no more, in the sense that they shall never pant for more than they have.

They shall have done with the desires which it is right for them to have here—desires which intimate their present imperfection. Here it is their duty and their privilege to long after perfection, to be sighing and crying for a perfect deliverance from every shade of sin; but they shall not sigh and cry for this in glory, for they shall be without fault before the throne of God. None of them shall cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This on earth is one of the most deeply spiritual of cries, never heard from any but those whose sanctification is greatly advanced. None will ever utter that bitter exclamation but men like Paul, to whom the slightest speck of sin has a horror about it akin to death itself. Fanatical persons talk about being perfect; it is the talk of blind men: but those whose eyes have seen the Lord abhor themselves, and sigh and cry over what other men call failures, and mistakes, and infirmities. To them

their heart sins and unseen faults are things to weep over; they have sharp hungerings and piercing thirsts after complete likeness to Christ. This likeness the saints possess before the throne; and they shall not thirst any more, even after this best and most desirable of attainments, since they shall enjoy it to the full.

Beloved, observe that, as they have no kind of hunger, so they have also no measure of thirst; that is to say, they have no needs, no unsatisfied wishes of any sort. In whatever form a need might approach them, it is excluded, for both hunger and thirst are shut out. Oh, brothers, it has been blessed to hunger and thirst after righteousness, what must that higher blessedness be which rises above even these holy desires!

We have wishes here which ought not to be gratified; these occasion us our sharpest pangs of hunger; but there they shall never know an unlawful wish, a wandering desire, or even an unwise longing. They shall have all things that a renewed heart can enjoy. All that their perfected nature can yearn after they shall possess: there shall be no unsatisfied craving of their manhood, neither their risen body nor their sanctified spirit shall be moved to hunger or thirst after any evil, for there shall be nothing about them which has a tendency that way. The provision made for them shall be so absolutely complete that before they can desire any good thing they shall find it; before they know a need they shall have enjoyed the supply. This is wonderful! Yes, but all I can tell you is not the half of the truth.

Further, as we read we discover a third blessing, namely, that *every overpowering influence is attempered*;—"Neither shall the sun light on them." What if by that "sun" is meant the full glory of God! If you and I could be introduced into the divine presence at once and as we are, the first result upon us must be a swoon, and the second must be death. We are not able to endure the blaze of Deity as yet; its glory would cause a sunstroke to the soul. We might well cry with good Mr. Walsh, "Hold, Lord! Hold! Remember I am but an earthen vessel, and I cannot as yet hold much of thee." We are not prepared to endure the Lord as our Sun, in meridian splendour. In heaven they are able to endure the immediate presence of God, not only because of the Mediatorship of Christ, through whom the glory of God shines with tempered splendour upon the saints, but also because they themselves are strengthened. From all this earthly grossness quit, they are enabled to stand in that light to which no mortal man can now approach. To us even "our God is a consuming fire" while we are here; but in the saints there remaineth nothing to consume. The light of God is not too bright for eyes that Christ hath touched with heaven's own eyesalve. The vision of the Infinite is not too glorious for those whom the Lord has prepared to be with him and to see his face. What John of Patmos could not bear, the weakest saint in heaven can endure, not for an hour, but for the whole stretch of eternity. Blessed, indeed, are they who shall behold the King in the ivory palaces above!

When it is added, "Nor any heat," we learn that *injurious influences shall cease to operate.* By our surroundings here we are troubled with many heats. The very comforts of life, like warm weather, tend to dry us up. A man may have gold, a man may have health, a man may have

prosperity and honour till he is withered like the heath in the desert in the day of drought. Unless a dew from the Lord shall rest upon the branch of the prosperous he will be parched indeed. We have need of grace whenever God gives us blessings of a temporal kind. But no heat of that sort shall happen to saints in heaven: they can be rich, and honoured, and perfectly beautiful, and yet under no temptation to self-exaltation. Here the heats which are around us tend to fever us. Our fellow-men grow hot about this and that—the pursuit of wealth, the triumph of party politics, the honour of a family, and so forth; and we are all too apt to feel the common ague. Within ourselves, heats arise: unhealthy and unholy heats. We cannot go through this plague-smitten world altogether unscathed: every now and then we return to our quiet chamber, and feel that we have sickened, sickened in the company wherein we have tarried for an hour, sickened even in contact with those whom we sought to bless. Up yonder no fever shall burn the hearts of the glorified. Travelling through the wilderness of this world, on a sudden the hot sirocco of worldliness sweeps over us, laden with the burning dust of the desert, bearing death beneath its wings; God only can keep us in that evil hour; only as we lie on our faces before him can we hope to outlive the blast. Many are the temptations of this life: some of them soft and deceptive, others fierce and terrible; but up yonder no sirocco shall ever blow, and the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick."

See, then, the perfect provision which is made by Christ for his saints above, and listen while we try to show that this same provision, in a modified way, lies to our hand even now. Come, beloved, do we not dwell in God? Do we not sing, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations"? If any of you believers have wandered away from your resting-place, whose fault is that? Has not the Lord given you himself to be your perpetual pavilion? Has not Jesus said, "Abide in me"? Have you not sung in that sweet twenty-third Psalm, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever"? What more do you want? The Lord hath spread his tabernacle over you; you abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Whenever you dwell in God and the Lamb feeds you, do you not also realize that next expression, "they shall hunger no more"? Can you not sing when Christ is with you and you dwell in God—

> "I thirst, but not as once I did,
> The vain delights of earth to share;
> Thy wounds, Immanuel, all forbid
> That I should seek my pleasures there.
>
> "It was the sight of thy dear cross
> First wean'd my soul from earthly things:
> And taught me to esteem as dross
> The mirth of fools and pomp of kings."

A child of God in communion with Christ would not lift his finger to possess a world, nor wink his eye to see all the pomp of kings, nor move a step to enjoy all the honours of rank, nor rise from sitting at Jesus' feet to learn all the wisdom of philosophy. He is already filled; what can he have more? The best of the best has fallen to his portion, and shall he change it? No; like the olive tree, he saith, "Should I leave

my fatness, and go to be promoted over the trees?" and with the fig, he cries, "Should I forsake my sweetness, and go to be promoted over the trees?" He that eateth of the bread which Jesus gives him shall never hunger more after a painful sort. The husks of carnal joy have no attractions to the son who banquets at his father's table.

"Neither shall they thirst any more;" they shall feel that the Lord Jesus is such an all-satisfying, all-sufficient portion that their desires can go no further. I have sped across the sea with flying sails, bidding each gale waft me according to its will, hoping that I might somewhere find a port. Restlessly have I hastened to and fro, and been tossed up and down, the sport of every wave. My spirit has sped on and on through fair and foul, never abiding long in one stay. Happily there came a day when I found a fair haven. Down went my anchor; it took fast hold and held my barque. Under the lee of Calvary I found rest. Now blow ye winds, or cease to blow as shall best please you. I stir not out to sea again. In the fair haven of the love of God in Christ Jesus shall my spirit abide for ever. If we could but reach this resolve, dear brethren, and hold to it, we should have no more anxieties and longings; we also should hunger no more, neither thirst any more.

And then how blessedly true it is to those who dwell in God and live near to Jesus that now the sun doth not light on them. God in his infinite majesty and holiness does not overwhelm us.

"Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind.

"But if Immanuel's face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His love forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins."

What a blessing it is to see God in Christ, and to rejoice in him.

And, now, beloved, if you are being daily fed by Jesus and are dwelling in God, the light of the sun, as to temporal prosperity, will do you no harm. You may be rich, but you will not trust in uncertain riches; you may be famous, but you will be as humble as if you were obscure; you may be learned, but you will sit at Jesus' feet; you may be indulged with all kinds of worldly prosperity, and yet these things will not prove a snare unto you. "Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat."

Those who dwell in God are not now parched with inward heat. We notice people of God who are anxious and fretful, and cause a great deal of misery for people round about them by always worrying, fidgetting, and being in a state of nervous excitement. But holy souls, who abide in Christ, take everything calmly. You can remember such persons, both men and women;—whatever happened they remained unmoved, patient and cheerful. Great losses came in the course of business, but the brother did not lose his balance; sad bereavements came, but the sister did not repine. If the believer endured a sharp affliction, his chief concern was that the Lord would sanctify it to him: if people persecuted or slandered him he was not surprised, for he expected to be hated of the world when he became a follower of Jesus.

If he prospered, he did not get into a heat of pride, and begin to crow over everybody else like a cock on his dunghill. In patience he possessed his soul. God's good gift of the Holy Spirit comforted and strengthened him. He could say, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." "Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." How much of mischief comes to the human body through its heats! The doctor looks hopeful when our blood grows cool again and the fever ceases. The best cure for the fever of the soul is to be made to dwell under the shadow of the Almighty, and to be fed by the Lord Jesus Christ; for that sacred shadow, and that health-giving food, prevent the burning sickness from coming near the chosen of the Lord. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." Safe, calm, happy, restful shalt thou be: thy soul shall dwell at ease, and with the meek thou shalt inherit the earth.

"Ah," says somebody, "you are setting us up an exceedingly high standard." I am setting up a standard to which multitudes of God's people have attained, to which I would have you all attain. If this blessed bribe of heaven below does not make you ambitious to rise to this level, what more shall I say? It is for your own profit and for God's glory that you should not rest content short of this. Rise from the dust, my brethren. Ascend into the hill of the Lord, and stand in his holy place. Abide in Christ, and feed upon Christ, and then all this shall be yours to-day and throughout life. So much for the perfection of the provision.

II. Now will you give me your heart's attention while I touch a noble string, and that is, THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." You see this is the reason for all the provision and enjoyment: the verse begins with the word "For," signifying that this is the cause of all the felicity of the blessed, that the Lamb doth feed and lead them.

Who is this that feeds them? It is *the Lamb.* I wish it were possible for me to communicate to you the enjoyment my own soul has had in meditating upon this blessed word "The Lamb," as it stands in this connection. Does it not teach us, first, that our comfort and life must come from *our incarnate Saviour*—the Lamb? The expression is very peculiar: it is a figure, and no figure; a mixed metaphor, and yet most plain and clear! It is written, "The Lamb shall shepherd them." This is an accurate interpretation. How is that? A shepherd, and that shepherd a Lamb! Here is the truth which the words contain,—he that saves is a man like ourselves. He that provides for his people is himself one of them,—"For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." A lamb is a member of the flock; but in this case the Lamb is the shepherd of the flock: a shepherd who is also a lamb must be the most tender shepherd conceivable, the most sympathetic and brotherly guardian that can be. When a man is shepherd to sheep

he should be compassionate, but he cannot be so tender as if he actually partook of their nature. In our case our shepherd is to the full a partaker of our nature: we are men, and our shepherd is a man.

Beloved, our soul's support, our spiritual meat, lies in this, that the Son of God is a partaker of flesh and blood, and is one of ourselves. He that sits upon the throne is our kinsman, a sharer in our nature, a brother born of adversity—why, surely this heavenly truth is manna from heaven, the food of saintly souls. The Lamb is their hope, their comfort, their honour, their delight, their glory.

Does it not mean more than that? "the Lamb" surely refers to *sacrifice*. Only run your eye back a verse or two, and you have the key of the expression, "they that washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." He, then, that feeds his people in heaven is the sacrifice, the atonement, the expiation. In heaven they glory in the cross. Each one sings "he loved me and gave himself for me." The glorified drink the deepest draughts of delight from the fact that God was made flesh, and that in human flesh he offered perfect expiation for human guilt. Brethren, these two fountains are here as well as there: come, let us drink of them; let us prevent our thirst by the water of the well of Bethlehem, and by streams from the smitten rock.

Still, there is a third meaning which must not be overlooked. "The Lamb" must refer to *the meekness of character*, the lowliness and condescension of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ on earth was "led as a lamb to the slaughter." He was "meek and lowly in heart." He walked up and down among men, the friend of sinners, the lover of little children, the companion of the poor, and to-day he is not otherwise than he was on the earth. Though heaven adores him, he is still as compassionate and condescending as he was in the days of his flesh, and this is why he can feed his people so well both here and in heaven.

I beg you to dwell upon that word "Lamb" till you feed upon it with your whole souls. Jesus has joined himself to his flock: "As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." As surely as he is God he is also man, indeed and of a truth; not in semblance, but in reality.

> "It is my sweetest comfort, Lord,
> And will for ever be,
> To muse upon the gracious truth
> Of thy humanity.
>
> "Oh, joy! there sitteth in our flesh,
> Upon a throne of light,
> One of a human mother born,
> In perfect Godhead bright!
>
> "For ever God, for ever man,
> My Jesus shall endure;
> And fix'd on him, my hope remains
> Eternally secure."

He is also our sacrifice: "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." What rest came unto our hearts when we first understood the meaning of that word—"Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world"! Continue to behold him, and all your feverish heats will be abated, and your hunger and thirst of spirit will be gone.

Jesus is so meek and lowly, as I have said, that you may approach to him at all times, and he will manifest himself to you. He is tender and gentle, and never makes himself strange unto his own flesh. Sitting at his feet you shall find rest unto your soul. "Neither shall the sun light on you, nor any heat."

The character of our Lord, then, brings our spirit all that it needs; but yet this is not all: the text speaks of "*the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne*" as feeding them. Think of that, the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Can you put these two things together, a sacrifice and a throne? That same Saviour who opened his veins that he might cleanse us from sin now wears the imperial purple of the universe. He that stooped to be made sin for us is now supreme sovereign, King of kings and Lord of lords. Think of that and be comforted. Our Representative is glorified. Our covenant Head, our second Adam, is in the midst of the throne. God the Father hath exalted the Mediator to the place of power and honour and rule. Our Saviour hath all power in heaven and in earth. Sometimes when I think of my great King and Captain exalted to so glorious an estate, I feel that it matters nothing what becomes of me, his poor follower. The sun of persecution smites not when he is seen as God over all blessed for ever. Hunger is not hunger, and pain is not pain, for such a loved one. In blissful sympathy with the unutterable delights of Jesus, we are happy at our worst, feeling that if Christ be rich we are not poor, and if Christ be happy we are not disappointed. His victory is our victory. His glory is our glory. Feel this union with your enthroned Lord, and you will begin to be in heaven.

Yet further remember that when we read of "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne," it must mean that our Redeemer is the most conspicuous of persons. In the forefront of the throne is Jesus. He is seen of angels; he is beheld continually with wonder by all the servants of our God. The sovereignty of God, his royal power, his eternal majesty are at the back of Christ to sustain his cause and make his name illustrious. He must reign. Every eye must see him, every knee must bow to him, and every tongue must call him Lord, to the glory of God the Father. He shall have all enemies under his feet, and shall be extolled, and exalted, and be very high. My heart rejoices to remember this fact in this cloudy and dark day. Though our modern thinkers sneer at the gospel, and sceptics scoff at the doctrine of the Nazarene, and all manner of scorn is poured upon our holy faith, yet the Lord hath set his Son upon his holy hill, and he is there with him to secure his everlasting dominion, despite the assaults of men and devils.

In all this I see the choicest food for the flock of God. To them Jesus speaks from the throne, and uses to-day words like those which he spoke on earth. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Out of the glory he saith, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

The "midst of the throne" seems to signify also that Jesus has become the very centre of all things. "Unto him shall the gathering of the people be." He is lifted up, and all men are drawn to him. He is the great central sun, and all other lights revolve about him. He is the

heart of the eternal purpose, the hinge of history, and the climax of revelation. He reigns in the midst of heaven, even as at this day upon earth he is in the midst of two or three who are met together in his name. Our joy is like that of the just made perfect. In this delight we unite with the general assembly and church of the firstborn. Jesus on the throne is to our hearts and songs the central person, and the centre shall never be removed, neither shall the gathering of his people be scattered.

Thus you see who it is that feeds the saints in heaven, and I desire you to feel that if you are to be fed and comforted here below, it must be by the same great Shepherd of the sheep, in the same character. There are no stores for you other than those which are in the hands of Jesus, in whom all fulness dwells; there are no comforts for you except as they are given from the throne where the Lamb is reigning. Turn ye away, my brethren, turn ye away from all the frothy novelties of modern thought, and the vain inventions of man, and behold the crown of your adorable Lord, the Lamb of God's Passover, the Lamb who shall overcome all the powers of evil and stand in the midst of the throne. Dwell on the literal, historical incarnation of the Son of God; believe in his literal death, in his actual substitution, his complete and perfect atonement; dwell on his rising from the dead, and his ascent to the right hand of God, and never doubt it that he is now the supreme object of heaven's adoration, the Lord of all things that are or shall be, sure and certain to be in the latter days exalted above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named. If we can but live on these truths, and delight ourselves in them, we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on us, nor any heat, but even here we shall find living fountains of water, and tears shall be wiped from our eyes.

III. I finish by giving a hint or two only upon the third point; that is to say, THE MANNER OF THIS PROVIDING. We have considered the provision in its perfection, and the Provider in his glorious character, now let us see how this provision is given to the saints, for in the same manner is it brought to us.

In two ways the saints in heaven enjoy it,—the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them. Go over this, and think first of *the feeding* of them. The Greek word is "shall shepherdize them." In heaven Jesus is a shepherd ruling over all his flock with a happy, genial, sympathetic sovereignty, to which they yield prompt and glad obedience. There the Lord Jesus cares for his people immediately and personally. He himself bestows upon them all that they require. Here he has under-shepherds, and he hands out the food by our poor instrumentality; and, alas, sometimes we are found incapable, or forgetful, and the flock is not fed: but it is never so in heaven, for the Lamb himself maintains the pastorate, and acts the shepherd in a manner which none of us can emulate. What saith the prophet Micah? "And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth."

All else of care and feeding that saints can require in glory is in Christ. I know not what it may be, but this I know, that while they worship him he cares for them. He is among them as the Chief

Shepherd, at whose appearing the under-shepherds shall appear with him in glory.

Up yonder Jesus still communes with them very closely, else were it not written, "The Lamb shall feed them." I remind you again of what we have said: he feeds them, therefore he is their Shepherd; yet still it is the Lamb that feeds them, therefore he is one with them; as if he fed with them, as if their food was his food, and his food their food, and they were one with him in all respects. But what must fellowship with Christ be in heaven! I do protest I have sometimes had, and many of you have had, such communion with Jesus here that, if I could but have continued to enjoy it, it would not have concerned me the turning of a penny whether I were here or among the angels, for it was bliss enough for me to be with Jesus. But, oh! when we shall have enlarged our capacities, when our understanding shall have been cleared, and our affections purified, and all our manhood shall be made innocent and Christlike, what must it be then to behold his glory, to commune with himself, to lean our head upon his bosom, to bask in his love, and to feel our hearts on fire with love in return! Oh to be with him for ever, to see no intervening cloud, to feel no wandering wish, no thought of future declension, no possibility of grieving him by sin! What must it be to be for ever one with him in his glory! That is bliss above conception. He shepherdizes them, he himself does it, and therefore they are supremely blessed. Now do you not think we can enjoy some of this to-day? Do you question it? What does the tenth of John mean, if Jesus is not the good Shepherd of his sheep at this day? Read it through when you get home. What does the twenty-third Psalm mean? Is that a psalm for another world, or for this? Does it not say, "The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He *maketh* me to lie down in green pastures: he *leadeth* me beside the still waters"? Why, one would think from the look of your doubtful face that it ran thus—"The Lord has forgotten to be my shepherd. He has given me over to the wolf. He has driven me into a wilderness, and left me among the dark mountains. I perish in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." It is not so; we must not think it so, for even here our great Lord is our Shepherd, and he careth for each one of the flock.

Then it is added, "*He shall lead.*" That is another work of the Shepherd, to lead his flock,—"He leads them to living fountains of waters." You may read it, "he shall guide them to fountains of waters of life"; it is but a variation of the same thought. Now, even in heaven the holy ones need guiding, and Jesus leads the way. While he is guiding, he points out to his people the secret founts and fresh springs which as yet they have not tasted. As eternity goes on, I have no doubt that the Saviour will be indicating fresh delights to his redeemed. "Come hither," saith he to his flock, "here are yet more flowing streams." He will lead them on and on, by the century, aye, by the chiliad, from glory unto glory, onward and upward in growing knowledge and enjoyment. Continually will he conduct his flock to deeper mysteries and higher glories. Never will the inexhaustible God who has given himself to be the portion of his people ever be fully known, so that there will eternally be sources of freshness and new delight, and the Shepherd

will continue to lead his flock to these living fountains of water. He will guide them,

> "'From glory unto glory' that ever lies before,
> Still widening, adoring, rejoicing more and more,
> Still following where he leadeth, from shining field to field,
> Himself our goal of glory, Revealer and Revealed!"

He will also cause them to drink of the river of his pleasures, so that they shall be full of bliss. Can we not grasp a little of this to-day? If we will but follow Christ we may drink of the water which he freely gives to all who believe in him, even as he gave to the woman of Samaria. "I cannot see any joy," cries one. No; but Jesus will lead you to it. "Oh, but I read my Bible this morning, and I did not get anything from it." That may be; but if Jesus had been there and led you to the fountain, you would have been refreshed. How the texts open up when Jesus touches them! You are like Hagar; you have laid your child down among the shrubs to die; you are perishing of thirst, and yet if you would but listen you might hear the plash of the falling waters just behind you. You only need the Lord to speak and open your eyes and you will see rich supplies, for the living fountain is near at hand. Go you to the Saviour to-day, and say, "Lord, lead me to living fountains of water. I drank years ago, and I have been drinking all along, but Lord I want deeper draughts. I desire to know more and love more." Jesus will lead you. He will do it *now*, and when he does so you will realise to the full how like this earth may be to heaven above. Let us commit ourselves like sheep to our great Shepherd. Come, ye wanderers, return to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. You that have been in him these many years and fed in his pastures, come near to him and follow him yet more closely, and your eyes shall be opened to see new rivers of delight where all seemed dry. You shall find in the valley of Baca a well, and drinking of it you shall go from strength to strength, till every one of you in Zion appeareth before God. How long will it be, O ever-blessed One, till we behold thee? Even now the day breaketh!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Revelation vii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—912, 877, 775.

N.B.—Will the reader please note that this is number 1,800 of our consecutive sermons in this form. We bless the God of all grace that for all these years every Thursday has seen its sermon. The sale is well sustained, but we should be very grateful if friends would endeavour to increase it.—C. H. S.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."—Luke xv. 4—7.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ while he was here below was continually in the pursuit of lost souls. He was seeking lost men and women, and it was for this reason that he went down among them, even among those who were most evidently lost, that he might find them. He took pains to put himself where he could come into communication with them, and he exhibited such kindliness towards them that in crowds they drew near to hear him. I dare say it was a queer-looking assembly, a disreputable rabble, which made the Lord Jesus its centre. I am not astonished that the Pharisee, when he looked upon the congregation, sneered and said, "He collects around him the pariahs of our community, the wretches who collect taxes for the foreigner of God's free people; and the fallen women of the towns, and such-like riffraff make up his audiences; and he, instead of repelling them, receives them, welcomes them, looks upon them as a class to whom he has a peculiar relationship. He even eats with them. Did he not go into the house of Zaccheus, and the house of Levi, and partake of the feasts which these low people made for him?" We cannot tell you all the Pharisees thought, it might not be edifying to attempt it; but they thought as badly of the Lord as they possibly could, because of the company which surrounded him. And so, he deigns in this parable to defend himself; not that he cared much about what they might think, but that they might have no excuse for speaking so bitterly of him. He tells them that he was seeking the lost, and where should he be found but among those whom he was seeking? Should a physician shun the sick? Should a shepherd avoid the lost sheep? Was he not exactly in his right position when there "drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him"?

Our divine Lord defended himself by what is called an *argumentum ad hominem*, an argument to the men themselves; for he said, "What man *of you*, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not go after that which is lost, until he find it?" No argument tells more powerfully upon men than one which comes close home to their own daily life, and the Saviour put it so. They were silenced, if they were not convinced. It was a peculiarly strong argument, because in their case it was only a sheep that they would go after, but in his case it was something infinitely more precious than all the flocks of sheep that ever fed on Sharon or Carmel; for it was the soul of man which he sought to save. The argument had in it not only the point of peculiar adaptation, but a force at the back of it unusually powerful for driving it home upon every honest mind. It may be opened out in this fashion,—"If you men would each one of you go after a lost sheep, and follow in its track until you found it, how much more may I go after lost souls, and follow them in all their wanderings until I can rescue them?" The going after the sheep is a part of the parable which our Lord meant them to observe: the shepherd pursues a route which he would never think of pursuing if it were only for his own pleasure; his way is not selected for his own ends, but for the sake of the stray sheep. He takes a track up hill and down dale, far into a desert, or into some dark wood, simply because the sheep has gone that way, and he must follow it until he find it. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a matter of taste and pleasure, would never have been found among the publicans and sinners, nor among any of our guilty race: if he had consulted his own ease and comfort he would have consorted only with pure and holy angels, and the great Father above; but he was not thinking of himself, his heart was set upon the lost ones, and therefore he went where the lost sheep were; "for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The more steadily you look at this parable the more clearly you will see that our Lord's answer was complete. We need not this morning regard it exclusively as an answer to Pharisees, but we may look at it as an instruction to ourselves; for it is quite as complete in that direction. May the good Spirit instruct us as we muse upon it.

I. In the first place, I call attention to this observation: THE ONE SUBJECT OF THOUGHT to the man who had lost his sheep. This sets forth to us the one thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, when he sees a man lost to holiness and happiness by wandering into sin.

The shepherd, on looking over his little flock of one hundred, can only count ninety-nine. He counts them again, and he notices that a certain one has gone: it may be a white-faced sheep with a black mark on its foot: he knows all about it, for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." The shepherd has a photograph of the wanderer in his mind's eye, and now he thinks but little of the ninety and nine who are feeding in the pastures of the wilderness, but his mind is in a ferment about the one lost sheep. This one idea possesses him: "a sheep is lost!" This agitates his mind more and more—"a sheep is lost." It masters his every faculty. He cannot eat bread; he cannot return to his home; he cannot rest while one sheep is lost.

To a tender heart a lost sheep is a painful subject of thought. It is

a sheep, and therefore utterly *defenceless* now that it has left its defender. If the wolf should spy it out, or the lion or the bear should come across its track, it would be torn in pieces in an instant. Thus the shepherd asks his heart the question—"What will become of my sheep? Perhaps at this very moment a lion may be ready to spring upon it, and, if so, it cannot help itself!" A sheep is not prepared for fight, and even for flight it has not the swiftness of its enemy. That makes its compassionate owner the more sad as he thinks again—"A sheep is lost, it is in great danger of a cruel death." A sheep is of all creatures the most *senseless*. If we have lost a dog, it may find its way home again; possibly a horse might return to its master's stable; but a sheep will wander on and on, in endless mazes lost. It is too foolish a thing to think of returning to the place of safety. A lost sheep is lost indeed in countries where lands lie unenclosed and the plains are boundless. That fact still seems to ring in the man's soul—"A sheep is lost, and it will not return, for it is a foolish thing. Where may it not have gone by this time? Weary and worn, it may be fainting; it may be far away from green pastures, and be ready to perish with hunger among the bare rocks or upon the arid sand." A sheep is *shiftless;* it knows nothing about providing for itself. The camel can scent water from afar, and a vulture can espy its food from an enormous distance; but the sheep can find nothing for itself. Of all wretched creatures a lost sheep is one of the worst. If anybody had stepped up to the shepherd just then, and said, "Good sir, what aileth you? you seem in great concern"; he would have replied, "And well I may be, for a sheep is lost." "It is only one, sir; and I see you have ninety-nine left." "Do you call it nothing to lose one? You are no shepherd yourself, or you would not trifle so. Why, I seem to forget these ninety-nine that are all safe, and my mind only remembers that one which is lost."

What is it which makes the Great Shepherd lay so much to his heart the loss of one of his flock? What is it that makes him agitated as he reflects upon that supposition—"if he lose one of them"?

I think it is, first, because of *his property in it.* The parable does not so much speak of a hired shepherd, but of a shepherd proprietor. "What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them." Jesus, in another place, speaks of the hireling, whose own the sheep are not, and therefore he flees when the wolf comes. It is the shepherd proprietor who lays down his life for the sheep. It is not a sheep alone, and a lost sheep, but it is one of his own lost sheep that this man cares for. This parable is not written about lost humanity in the bulk—it may be so used if you please—but in its first sense it is written about Christ's own sheep; as also is the second parable concerning the woman's own money; and the third, not concerning any prodigal youth, but the father's own son. Jesus has his own sheep, and some of them are lost: yea, they were all once in the same condition; for "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." The parable refers to the unconverted, whom Jesus has redeemed with his most precious blood, and whom he has undertaken to seek and to save: these are those other sheep whom also he must bring in. "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them

out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." The sheep of Christ are his long before they know it—his even when they wander; and when they are brought into the fold by the effectual working of his grace they become manifestly what they were in covenant from of old. The sheep are Christ's, first, because he chose them from before the foundations of the world—"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." His, next, because the Father gave them to him. How he dwells upon that fact in his great prayer in John xvii.: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." We are the Lord's own flock, furthermore, by his purchase of us; he says: "I lay down my life for the sheep." It is nearly nineteen centuries ago since he paid the ransom price, and bought us to be his own; and we shall be his, for that purchase-money was not paid in vain. And so the Saviour looks upon his hands, and sees the marks of his purchase; he looks upon his side, and sees the token of the effectual redemption of his own elect unto himself by the pouring out of his own heart's blood before the living God. This thought, therefore, presses upon him, "One of my sheep is lost." It is a wonderful supposition, that which is contained in this parable—"if he lose one of them." What! lose one whom he loved or ever the earth was? It may wander for a time, but he will not have it lost for ever: that he cannot bear. What! lose one whom his Father gave him to be his own? Lose one whom he has bought with his own life? He will not endure the thought. That word—"if he lose one of them" sets his soul on fire. It shall not be. You know how much the Lord has valued each one of his chosen, laying down his life for his redemption. You know how dearly he loves every one of his people: it is no new passion with him, neither can it grow old. He has loved his own and must love them to the end. From eternity that love has endured already, and it must continue throughout the ages, for he changeth not. Will he lose one of those so dearly loved? Never; never. He has eternal possession of them by a covenant of salt, wherein the Father hath given them to him: this it is which in great measure stirs his soul so that he thinks of nothing but this fact,—One of my sheep is lost.

Secondly, he has yet another reason for this all-absorbing thought, namely, *his great compassion* for his lost sheep. The wandering of a soul causes Jesus deep sorrow; he cannot bear the thought of its perishing. Such is the love and tenderness of his heart that he cannot bear that one of his own should be in jeopardy. He can take no rest as long as a soul for whom he shed his blood still abides under the dominion of Satan and under the power of sin; therefore the Great Shepherd neither night nor day forgetteth his sheep: he must save his flock, and he is straitened till it be accomplished.

He has a deep sympathy with each stray heart. He knows the sorrow that sin brings, the deep pollution and the terrible wounding that comes of transgression, even at the time; and the sore heart and the broken spirit that will come of it before long; and so the sympathetic Saviour grieves over each lost sheep, for he knows the

misery which lies in the fact of being lost. If you have ever been in a house with a mother and father, and daughters and sons, when a little child has been lost, you will never forget the agitation of each member of the household. See the father as he goes to the police-station, and calls at every likely house; for he must find his child or break his heart. See the deep oppression and bitter anguish of the mother; she is like one distracted till she has news of her darling. You now begin to understand what Jesus feels for one whom he loves, who is graven on the palms of his hands, whom he looked upon in the glass of his foreknowledge, when he was bleeding his life away upon the tree; he hath no rest in his spirit till his beloved is found. He hath compassion like a God, and that doth transcend all the compassion of parents or of brothers,—the compassion of an infinite heart brimming over with an ocean of love. This one thought moves the pity of the Lord—"if he lose one of them."

Moreover, the man in the parable had a third relation to the sheep, which made him possessed with the one thought of its being lost,—*he was a shepherd to it.* It was his own sheep, and he had therefore for that very reason become its shepherd; and he says to himself, "If I lose one of them my shepherd-work will be ill-done." What dishonour it would be to a shepherd to lose one of his sheep! Either it must be for want of power to keep it, or want of will, or want of watchfulness; but none of these can appertain to the Chief Shepherd. Our Lord Jesus Christ will never have it said of him that he has lost one of his people, for he glories in having preserved them all. "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." The devil shall never say that Jesus suffered one whom his Father gave him to perish. His work of love cannot in any degree become a failure. His death in vain! No, not in jot or tittle. I can imagine, if it were possible, that the Son of God should live in vain: but to die in vain! It shall never be. The purpose that he meant to achieve by his passion and death he shall achieve, for he is the Eternal, the Infinite, the Omnipotent; and who shall stay his hand, or baffle his design? He will not have it. "If he lose one of them," says the passage; imagine the consequence. What scorn would come from Satan! What derision would he pour upon the Shepherd! How hell would ring with the news, "He hath lost one of them." Suppose it to be the feeblest; then would they cry, "He could keep the strong, who could keep themselves." Suppose it to be the strongest; then would they cry, "He could not even keep one of the mightiest of them, but must needs let him perish." This is good argument, for Moses pleaded with God, "What will the Egyptians say?" It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones shall perish, neither is it for the glory of Christ that one of his own sheep should be eternally lost.

You see the reason for the Lord's heart being filled with one burning thought; for first, the sheep is his own; next, he is full of compassion; and then again, it is his office to shepherd the flock.

All this while the sheep is not thinking about the shepherd, or caring for him in the least degree. Some of you are not thinking at all about

the Lord Jesus. You have no wish nor will to seek after him! What folly! Oh, the pity of it, that the great heart above should be yearning over you to-day, and should fail to rest because you are in peril, and you, who will be the greater loser, for you will lose your own soul, are sporting with sin, and making yourself merry with destruction. Ah, me! how far you have wandered! How hopeless would your case be if there were not an Almighty Shepherd to think upon you.

II. Now we come to the second point, and observe THE ONE OBJECT OF SEARCH. This sheep lies on the shepherd's heart, and he must at once set out to look for it. He leaves the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and goes after that which is lost until he find it.

Observe here that it is *a definite search.* The shepherd goes after the sheep, and after nothing else; and he has the one particular sheep in his mind's eye. I should have imagined, from the way in which I have seen this text handled, that Christ, the Shepherd, went down into the wilderness to catch anybody's sheep he could find. Many were running about, and he did not own any one of them more than another, but was content to pick up the one that he could first lay hold upon; or rather, that which first came running after him. Not so is the case depicted in the parable. It is his own sheep that he is seeking, and he goes distinctly after that one. It is his sheep which was lost,—a well-known sheep; well known not only to himself, but even to his friends and neighbours,—for he speaks to them as if it was perfectly understood which sheep it was that he went to save. Jesus knows all about his redeemed, and he goes definitely after such and such a soul. When I am preaching in the name of the Lord, I delight to think that I am sent to individuals with the message of mercy. I am not going to draw the bow at a venture at all; but when the Divine hands are put on mine to draw the bow, the Lord takes such aim that no arrow misses its mark: into the very centre of the heart the word finds its way; for Jesus goes not forth at a peradventure in his dealings with men. He subdues the will and conquers the heart, making his people willing in the day of his power. He calls individuals and they come. He saith, "Mary," and the response is, "Rabboni." I say, the man in the parable sought out a distinct individual, and rested not till he found it; and so doth the Lord Jesus in the movements of his love go forth at no uncertainty: he does not grope about to catch whom he may, as if he played at Blindman's-buff with salvation, but he seeks and saves the one out of his own sheep which he has his eye upon in its wanderings. Jesus knows what he means to do, and he will perform it to the glory of the Father.

Note that this is *an all-absorbing search.* He is thinking of nothing but his own lost sheep. The ninety-and-nine are left in safety; but they *are* left. When we read that he leaves them in the wilderness we are apt to think of some barren place; but that is not intended: it simply means the open pasturage, the steppe, the prairie: he leaves them well provided for, leaves them because he can leave them. For the time being he is carried away with the one thought that he must seek and save the lost one, and therefore he leaves the ninety-and-nine in their pasture. "Shepherd, the way is very rocky!" He does not seem to know what the way is, his heart is with his lost sheep. "Shepherd,

it is a heavy climb up yon mountain side." He does not note his toil; his excitement lends him the feet of the wild goat; he stands securely where at other times his foot would slip. He looks around for his sheep and seems to see neither crag nor chasm. "Shepherd, it is a terrible path by which you must descend into yonder gloomy valley." It is not terrible to him: his only terror is lest his sheep should perish; he is taken up with that one fear, and nothing else. He leaps into danger, and escapes it by the one strong impulse which bears him on. It is grand to think of the Lord Jesus Christ with his heart set immovably upon the rescue of a soul which at this moment is lost to him.

It is *an active search* too; for observe, he goes after that which is lost, until he find it; and he does this with *a personal search.* He does not say to one of his underlings, "Here, hasten after that sheep which was lost, and bring it home." No, *he* follows it himself. And if ever there is a soul brought from sin to grace, it is not by us poor ministers working alone, but it is by the Master himself, who goes after his own sheep. It is glorious to think of him still personally tracking sinners, who, though they fly from him with a desperateness of folly, yet are still pursued by him—pursued by the Son of God, by the Eternal Lover of men—pursued by him until he finds them.

For notice *the perseverance of the search:* "until he find it." He does not stop till he has done the deed. You and I ought to seek after a soul, how long? Why, until we find it; for such is the model set before us by the Master. The parable says nothing about his not finding it; no hint of failure is given; we dream not that there may be a sheep belonging to him which he will never find. Oh, brethren, there are a great many whom you and I would never find; but when Jesus is after his own lost sheep, depend upon it such is his skill, so clearly doth he see, and so effectually doth he intervene, that he will surely bring them in. A defeated Christ I cannot conceive of. It is a personal search, and a persevering search, and *a successful search,* until he finds it. Let us praise and bless his name for this.

Observe that when the shepherd does find it, there is a little touch in the parable not often noticed,—he does not appear to put it back into the fold again: I mean, we do not find it so written, as a fact to be noted. I suppose he did so place it ultimately; but for the time being he keeps it with himself rather than with its fellows. The next scene is the shepherd at home, saying, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." It looks as if Jesus did not save a soul so much to the church as to himself, and though the saved are in the flock, the greatest joy of all is that the sheep is with the shepherd. This shows you how thoroughly Christ lays himself out that he may save his people. There is nothing in Christ that does not tend towards the salvation of his redeemed. There are no pull-backs with him, no half-consecrated influences which make him linger. In the pursuit of certain objects we lay out a portion of our faculties; but Jesus lays out all his powers upon the seeking and saving of souls.

The whole Christ seeks after each sinner; and when the Lord finds it, he gives himself to that one soul as if he had but that one soul to bless. How my heart admires the concentration of all the Godhead and manhood of Christ in his search after each sheep of his flock.

III. Now, we must pass on very briefly to notice a third point. We have had one subject of thought and one object of search; now we have ONE BURDEN OF LOVE. When the seeking is ended, then the saving appears,—"When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." Splendid action this! How beautifully the parable sets forth the whole of salvation. Some of the old writers delight to put it thus: in his incarnation he came after the lost sheep; in his life he continued to seek it; in his death he laid it upon his shoulders; in his resurrection he bore it on its way, and in his ascension he brought it home rejoicing. Our Lord's career is a course of soul-winning, a life laid out for his people; and in it you may trace the whole process of salvation.

But now, see, the shepherd finds the sheep, and he layeth it on his shoulders. It is *an uplifting action*, raising the fallen one from the earth whereon he hath strayed. It is as though he took the sheep just as it was, without a word of rebuke, without delay or hesitancy, and lifted it out of the slough or the briers into a place of safety. Do you not remember when the Lord lifted you up from the horrible pit? when he sent from above, and delivered you, and became your strength? I shall never forget that day. What a wonderful lift it was for me when the Great Shepherd lifted me into newness of life. The Lord said of Israel, "I bare you on eagles' wings;" but it is a dearer emblem still to be borne upon the shoulders of the incarnate Lord.

This laying on the shoulders was *an appropriating act.* He seemed to say, "You are my sheep, and therefore I lay you on my shoulders." He did not make his claim in so many words, but by a rapid action he declared it: for a man does not bear away a sheep to which he has no right: this was not a sheep-stealer, but a shepherd-proprietor. He holds fast the sheep by all four of its legs, so that it cannot stir, and then he lays it on his own shoulders, for it is all his own now. He seems to say, "I am a long way from home, and I am in a weary desert; but I have found my sheep, and these hands shall hold it." Here are our Lord's own words, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Hands of such might as those of Jesus will hold fast the found one. Shoulders of such power as those of Jesus will safely bear the found one home. It is all well with that sheep, for it is positively and experimentally the Good Shepherd's own, just as it always had been his in the eternal purpose of the Father. Do you remember when Jesus said unto you, "Thou art mine"? Then I know you also appropriated him, and began to sing—

> "So I my best Beloved's am,
> And he is mine."

More condescending still is another view of this act: it was *a deed of service* to the sheep. The sheep is uppermost, the weight of the sheep is upon the shepherd. The sheep rides, the shepherd is the burden-bearer. The sheep rests, the shepherd labours. "I am among you as he that serveth," said our Lord long ago. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." On that cross he bore the burden of our sin, and what is more, the burden of our very selves. Blessed be his name, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," and he hath

laid us on him, too, and he beareth us. Remember that choice Scripture: "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Soul-melting thought, the Son of God became subservient to the sons of man! The Maker of heaven and earth bowed his shoulders to bear the weight of sinners.

It was a *rest-giving* act, very likely *needful* to the sheep which could go no further, and was faint and weary. It was a full rest to the poor creature if it could have understood it, to feel itself upon its shepherd's shoulders, irresistibly carried back to safety. What a rest it is to you and to me to know that we are borne along by the eternal power and Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ! "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." The Christ upbears us to-day: we have no need of strength: our weakness is no impediment, for he bears us. Hath not the Lord said, "I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you"? We shall not even stumble, much less fall to ruin: the shepherd's feet shall traverse all the road in safety. No portion of the way back should cause us fear, for he is able to bear us even to his home above. What a sweet word is that in Deuteronomy: "The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place." Blessed rest of faith, to give yourself up entirely to those hands and shoulders to keep and carry you even to the end! Let us bless and praise the Lord. The shepherd is consecrated to his burden: he bears nothing on his shoulders but his sheep; and the Lord Jesus seemeth to bear no burden but that of his people. He layeth out his omnipotence to save his chosen; having redeemed them first with price of blood, he redeems them still with all his power. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." Oh the glorious grace of our unfailing Saviour, who consecrates himself to our salvation, and concentrates upon that object all that he has and is!

IV. We close by noticing one more matter, which is—THE ONE SOURCE OF JOY. This man who had lost his sheep is filled with joy, but his sheep is the sole source of it. His sheep has so taken up all his thought, and so commanded all his faculties, that as he found all his care centred upon it, so he now finds all his joy flowing from it.

I invite you to notice the first mention of joy we get here: "When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." "That is a great load for you, shepherd!" Joyfully he answers, "I am glad to have it on my shoulders." The mother does not say when she has found her lost child, "This is a heavy load." No; she presses it to her bosom. She does not mind how heavy it is; it is a dear burden to her. She is rejoiced to bear it once again. "He layeth it on his shoulders, *rejoicing*." Remember that text: "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." A great sorrow was on Christ when our load was laid on him; but a greater joy flashed into his mind when he thought that we were thus recovered from our lost estate. He said to himself, "I have taken them up upon my shoulders, and none can hurt them now, neither can they wander to destruction. I am bearing their sin, and they shall never come into condemnation. The penalty of their guilt has been laid

on me that it may never be laid on them. I am an effectual and efficient Substitute for them. I am bearing, that they may never bear, my Father's righteous ire." His love to them made it a joy to feel every lash of the scourge of justice; his love to them made it a delight that the nails should pierce his hands and feet, and that his heart should be broken with the absence of his Father, God. Even "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," when the deeps of its woe have been sounded, will be found to have pearls of joy in its caverns. No shout of triumph can equal that cry of grief, because our Lord joyed to bear even the forsaking of his Father for the sin of his chosen whom he had loved from before the foundation of the world. Oh, you cannot understand it except in a very feeble measure! Let us try to find an earthly miniature likeness. A son is taken ill far away from home. He is laid sick with a fever, and a telegram is sent home. His mother says she *must* go and nurse him; she is wretched till she can set out upon the journey. It is a dreary place where her boy lies, but for the moment it is the dearest spot on earth to her. She joys to leave the comforts of her home to tarry among strangers for the love of her boy. She feels an intense joy in sacrificing herself; she refuses to retire from the bedside, she will not leave her charge; she watches day and night, and only from utter exhaustion does she fall asleep. You could not have kept her in England, she would have been too wretched. It was a great, deep, solemn pleasure for her to be where she could minister to her own beloved. Soul, remember you have given Jesus great joy in his saving you. He was for ever with the Father, eternally happy, infinitely glorious, as God over all; but yet he must needs come hither out of boundless love, take upon himself our nature, and suffer in our stead to bring us back to holiness and God. "He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." That day the shepherd knew but one joy. He had found his sheep, and the very pressure of it upon his shoulders made his heart light, for he knew by that sign that the object of his care was safe beyond all question.

Now he goes home with it, and this joy of his was then so great that it filled his soul to overflowing. The parable speaks nothing as to his joy in getting home again, nor a word concerning the joy of being saluted by his friends and neighbours. No, the joy of having found his sheep eclipsed all other gladness of heart, and dimmed the light of home and friendship. He turns round to friends and neighbours and entreats them to help him to bear the weight of his happiness. He cries, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." One sinner had repented, and all heaven must make holiday concerning it. Oh, brethren, there is enough joy in the heart of Christ over his saved ones to flood all heaven with delight. The streets of Paradise run knee-deep with the heavenly waters of the Saviour's joy. They flow out of the very soul of Christ, and angels and glorified spirits bathe in the mighty stream. Let us do the same. We are friends if we are not neighbours. He calls us to-day to come and bring our hearts, like empty vessels, that he may fill them with his own joy, that our joy may be full. Those of us who are saved must enter into the joy of our Lord. When I was trying to think over this text I rejoiced with my Lord in the bringing in of each one of his sheep, for each one makes a heaven full of

joy. But, oh to see all the redeemed brought in! Jesus would have no joy if he should lose one: it would seem to spoil it all. If the purpose of mercy were frustrated in any one instance it were a dreary defeat of the great Saviour. But his purpose shall be carried out in every instance. He "shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He shall not fail nor be discouraged. He shall carry out the will of the Father. He shall have the full reward of his passion. Let us joy and rejoice with him this morning!

But the text tells us there was more joy over that one lost sheep than over the ninety-and-nine that went not astray. Who are these just persons that need no repentance? Well, you should never explain a parable so as to make it run on four legs if it was only meant to go on two. There may not be such persons at all, and yet the parable may be strictly accurate. If all of us had been such persons, and had never needed repentance, we should not have given as much joy to the heart of Christ as one sinner does when he repents. But suppose it to mean you and me who have long ago repented—who have, in a certain sense, now no need of repentance, because we are justified men and women—we do not give so much joy to the heart of God, for the time being, as a sinner does when he first returns unto God. It is not that it is a good thing to go astray, or a bad thing to be kept from it. You understand how that is: there are seven children in a family, and six of them are all well; but one dear child is taken seriously ill, and is brought near to the gates of death. It has recovered, its life is spared, and do you wonder that for the time being it gives more joy to the household than all the healthy ones? There is more expressed delight about it a great deal than over all those that have not been ill at all. This does not show it is a good thing to be ill. No, nothing of the kind; we are only speaking of *the joy* which comes of recovery from sickness. Take another case: you have a son who has been long away in a far country, and another son at home. You love them both equally, but when the absent son comes home he is for a season most upon your thoughts. Is it not natural that it should be so? Those at home give us joy constantly from day to day, but when the stream of joy has been dammed back by his absence, it pours down in a flood upon his return. Then we have "high days and holy days" and "bonfire nights."

There are special circumstances about repentance and conversion which produce joy over a restored wanderer. There was a preceding sorrow, and this sets off the joy by contrast. The shepherd was so touched with compassion for the lost sheep, that now his sorrow is inevitably turned into joy. He suffered a dreadful suspense, and that is a killing thing; it is like an acid eating into the soul. That suspense which makes one ask, Where is the sheep? Where can it be? is a piercing of the heart. All those weary hours of searching, and seeking, and following are painfully wearing to the heart. You feel as if you would almost sooner know that you never would find it than be in that doubtful state of mind. That suspense when it is ended naturally brings with it a sweet liberty of joy. Moreover, you know that the joy over penitents is so unselfish that you who have been kept by the grace of God for many years do not grieve that there should be more joy over a repenting sinner than over you. No, you say to yourself, "There

is good cause. I am myself among those who are glad." You remember that good men made great rejoicing over you when you first came to Jesus; and you heartily unite with them in welcoming newcomers. You will not act the elder brother, and say I will not share the joy of my Father. Not a bit of it; but you will enter heartily into the music and dancing, and count it your heaven to see souls saved from hell. I feel a sudden flush and flood of delight when I meet with a poor creature who once lay at hell's dark door, but is now brought to the gate of heaven. Do not you?

The one thing I want to leave with you is how our gracious Lord seems to give himself up to his own redeemed. How entirely and perfectly every thought of his heart, every action of his power, goes toward the needy, guilty, lost soul. He spends his all to bring back his banished. Poor souls who believe in him have his whole strength engaged on their behalf. Blessed be his name! Now let all our hearts go forth in love towards him, who gave all his heart to work our redemption. Let us love him. We cannot love him as he loved us as to measure; but let us do so in like manner. Let us love him with all our heart and soul. Let us feel as if we saw nothing, knew nothing, loved nothing save Jesus crucified. As we filled all *his* heart let him fill all our hearts!

Oh, poor sinner, here to-day, will you not yield to the Good Shepherd? Will you not stand still as he draws near? Will you not submit to his mighty grace? Know that your rescue from sin and death must be of him, and of him alone. Breathe a prayer to him,—"Come, Lord, I wait for thy salvation! Save me, for I trust in thee." If thou dost thus pray, thou hast the mark upon thee of Christ's sheep, for he saith, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Come to him, for he comes to you. Look to him for he looks to you.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xv. 1—24.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—387, 403, 388.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THOUGHT-READING EXTRAORDINARY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 5TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear."—Psalm x. 17.

NOTICE at the outset the logic of this verse. It is very simple, very forcible, very accurate logic. It runs thus: "Thou hast," "thou wilt." "Lord, *thou hast* heard the desire of the humble: *thou wilt* prepare their heart." When you know that the Lord God is immutable, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," you may conclude without mistake that what he has done he is prepared to do again. The argument from the past to the future would be a sorry one if you were dealing with fallible man; for what man has done is no sure guarantee of what he may do; he is such a creature of freaks and whims: but when you have to deal with the Eternal God, who is faithful and true, and changes not, you may reckon with safety that the thing which has been is the thing which shall be. Well did the apostle say, "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us."

On looking at the text again you will see that the same blessed logic is carried a step further; for you read, "Thou wilt," and then again, "thou wilt": "Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." Faith first of all concludes that God will bless because of former blessings, and then she is so sure of her conclusion that upon it she is prepared to build up a further confidence. This is a noble faith, worthy of imitation; but it is by no means common;—not a hundredth part so common as it ought to be. To doubtful minds it is difficult even to infer the future from a present fact immediately before their eye; but to the believing heart it is an easy thing to do something more than that, namely, to draw an inference of hope from a former inference of hope. Faith builds a sure abode with invisible stones. She expects because she has experienced, and experiences already what she expects. Why not? Is not faith the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen? Since that which we believe is sure, it is

worthy to be the foundation of further faith. We are very fond of that verse—

> "And a 'new song' is in my mouth,
> To long-loved music set;
> Glory to thee for all the grace
> I have not tasted yet."

By such language we praise God for mercy not yet received; and our text suggests another practical use of "things not seen as yet," namely, to make them, as apprehended by our faith, the basis of a still higher confidence in God. This is to be built up on our most holy faith. Rest assured that this is not constructing castles in the air; for our faith is no delusion, but is made of solid, substantial stuff, before which even the supposed infallibilities of science are trifles light as air. Because our Good Shepherd has made us to lie down in green pastures, we argue that there is no cause for fear though we walk through the valley of death-shade, and from that we surely gather that goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives. Such reasoning is as accurate as the demonstrations of geometry. The Lord will never leave us to be ashamed of our hope. Learn this logic and it will stand you in good stead in times of distress, when nothing but certainty will sustain you. The Lord is good, and therefore he will be good: he will keep the feet of his saints, and because he will do this we shall enter his palace with joy.

Apply this logic to prayer. God has answered prayer, and therefore he will answer it. Of this first statement many of us are witnesses. The evidences of that truth are with us in daily experience; we have proofs of the power of prayer as innumerable as the stars of heaven. Because the Lord has heard us out of his holy place we infer that he will still hear us, and therefore as long as we live will we call upon him. This is no casual thing, but it is Jehovah's perpetual name and standing memorial—the God that heareth prayer. Never while the earth endureth will he forsake the throne of grace and turn a deaf ear to the cries of his suppliant Israel.

The subject of this morning is thus introduced to you. It is necessary that you pray, for the needy must cry to their helper; and it is profitable that you pray, for the bosoms of suppliants are filled with benedictions. It is not a vain thing to wait upon God; it is your comfort, your strength, your life. If you seek honour it should be your delight to pray; for nothing is more ennobling than to win the ear of the Lord of all. A man admitted to audience with the Most High is honoured in an unspeakable degree.

We shall speak this morning in the way of five observations drawn from our text. May each one be made profitable to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I. Our first observation is written upon the surface of the Scripture before us—THE LOWLIEST FORM OF PRAYER MAY BE MOST TRUE AND ACCEPTABLE. And what is that lowliest form of prayer? Is it not described in the text? "The desire of the humble." It is not the prayer of the serene faith of Abraham, nor the wrestling of energetic Jacob, nor the intercession of prevailing Moses, nor the pleading of holy Samuel, nor the commanding cry of Elias shutting and opening heaven:

it is only a desire—a motion of the heart towards good things ; and yet the Lord hears it. Indeed, the lowliest form of prayer may be the truest; for the essence of all real prayer is desire. Words are but the habitation of prayer, the living tenant is desire. We see from our text that desires are prevailing prayers; for the Lord has made a point of hearing them: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." Other forms of prayer may be attractive to man, and yet they may have no influence whatever with the living God; but this manner of supplication has been successful from of old, even as it is written,—"He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him," and again, "The desire of the righteous shall be granted." In fact, prayer is desire, as our poet puts it,—

> "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
> Utter'd or unexpress'd;
> The motion of a hidden fire,
> That trembles in the breast."

The lowest form of true prayer secures the ear of the Highest, and what more is needed?

Observe, it is only *a desire:* "the desire of the humble." A desire may be altogether unattended by speech. The suppliant may not be able to put his desire into words at all: he may be too sorrowful, his emotion may choke his utterance; he may be too quiet, and so may be quite unversed in the use of speech. He may be only able to pour forth groanings that cannot be uttered, and tears whose eloquence is silent; yet God is pleased to hear the desire which lacks expression. Many prayers are very prettily expressed; in fact, they are expressed so grandly that their tawdry fineries will not be tolerated in heaven. Those prayers will never enter heaven's gate which are meant to catch the applause of man. God will say, "They were meant for men, and let men have them." He does not stoop to accept man's leavings, and if a prayer is meant to be a feast for man, God will not be a second-rate guest at its table. On the other hand, many sincere persons condemn themselves because they cannot offer public prayer as their brethren do: they even tremble, perhaps, to pray before their families, and this is a grief to them. I think, if they are men, they should prove their manhood by overcoming such diffidence. I would urge them to make the attempt with much resolution and perseverance; but should they fail in it through positive inability, there will be cause for regret, but no reason for self-condemnation. There may be more prayer in the silent than in the fluent. God has heard prayers which nobody else could possibly have heard, because there was no vocal sound about them. So quick is the ear of God that he heareth that which is not properly the subject of hearing: the true prayer which abides in silence shall not meet with a silent God.

This desire may not be recommended by any conscious attainments on the part of the offerer. The man may reach far in his desire, but he may have attained to little beyond. He may have a wealth of desire and a poverty of everything else, and yet he may be heard of the Lord. Possibly his confession may run thus,—"I desire to be humble, but I lament my pride; I desire to be strong in faith, but I mourn my unbelief; I desire to be fervent, but I sigh over my lukewarmness; I desire to

be holy, but I confess my transgressions; I desire my prayer should be such as God can accept, but I fear that I waver, or ask amiss." Now such a confession, if penitently presented, will not prevent our obtaining the promise; for the Lord hath heard the desire of the humble. If your heart seethes and boils with desires, the steam thereof will rise to heaven. If your stock-in-trade is made up of empty vessels, and little else, the Lord can deal with you as he did with the prophet's widow, "who had empty vessels not a few." Your little oil of grace he can multiply till every vessel is filled to the brim.

Have you desires?—great, hungry, thirsty desires? Then bring them to the Lord. Are your desires as insatiable as the horse-leech, which is always sucking, but which always craves for more, crying ever, "Give, give, give"? Then say with David, "All my desires are before thee," and be assured that the Lord satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Be comforted if your desires are awake. You are praying, and your cry is being heard: you shall yet say, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." Your desires have voices of their own: they knock hard at heaven's door, and it shall be opened unto them.

Note again, that this desire may be unaccompanied by any confident expectation. When you pray you ought to believe the promise and expect its fulfilment. It is the duty and the privilege of every suppliant to believe that when he prays in the name of Jesus he must and shall be heard. But sometimes humility, which is a good thing, is attended by a want of faith, which is an evil thing; and this much hinders prayer. Humility is deceived by unbelief, and so it gives way to the dark thought that its poor feeble prayer will not speed with God. I fear that in some cases this want of expectancy is an effectual barrier to prayer, and prevents its being answered; but it is forgiven to naturally despondent, heavily-laden spirits, whose fears are not so much doubts of God as a deeply humiliating judgment of themselves. It is not so much the case that their faith is sinfully defective as that they have a painfully acute sense of their own unworthiness; and so when they cry they hope that the Lord will hear them, and they mean to wait upon him till he does; but they are sore afraid. They will go nowhere else, for other hope they have none but that which lies in the free grace and sovereign mercy of God; but yet they do not exercise that happy expectancy which the sure promise warrants their enjoying. My brethren, I would chide your unbelief, but I would still encourage your desires; for that desire which God hears is not to be despised. The text saith, "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble," and the Lord will yet hear your humble sighs and groans; and you shall be surprised to find the Lord doing for you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or even thought. May your faith grow exceedingly, being fed upon the heavenly food which the Lord deals out to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

This leads me to observe that this commencing form of prayer which the Lord nevertheless hears, is here further described as "*the desire of the humble.*" It has this advantage about it, that it is free from pride. Some men's prayers, if they were to pray them as their foolish heart really desires, would be requests that they might be made famous. Startle not when I say it,—I fear that many men proudly ask to be humble:

they desire to be humble in order that they may be admired for it. I have no doubt whatever that some professors seek great grace that they may be highly thought of and greatly set by in the market of the church. Have we not all found that in the rushing stream of our earnest zeal there will be some back-water, which runs not towards God but towards ourselves? Have we not even striven to win souls that we might be notable as soul-winners? Ay, and have we not sought to glorify God that we might shine in the reflection of that glory? "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord," has been the language of many a Jehu. Oh, it is hard to keep out pride. This psalm says much concerning the proud man and the oppressor, whom God abhors, and will surely visit in judgment; and then shines forth this bright word, like a lone star in a dark night. Never was precious pearl found in a rougher oyster-shell. May the Lord keep us humble if we are so, and make us humble if we are not so. I believe every Christian man has a choice between being humble and being humbled. Now, to be humble is a sweet thing: there is no lovelier spot on the road to the celestial city than the Valley of Humiliation: he that lives in it dwells among flowers and birds, and may sing all day long, like the shepherd boy whose song ran thus,—

"He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide."

If you do not choose to be humble you will have to be humbled; and that is not at all a desirable thing. To be humbled is to be sorely smitten and made to suffer shame in the estimation of your fellow-men, both ungodly and godly. Certain persons who have carried their heads very high have struck them against the beam, and have had to go with bruised foreheads for the rest of their lives. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Therefore may God help us to offer before him "the desire of the humble."

"The desire of the humble" is saturated with a gospel spirit, and therefore is acceptable with the God of all grace. Pride seems born of the law, though I scarce know why it should be; for the law censures and condemns. Humility is the child of the gospel, and is brought up upon the knees of grace. If thou wouldst be a child of God thou must be lowly in thine own esteem. If thou wouldst be heard in prayer thou must come to God as needy and empty. Low thoughts of ourselves are the companions of prevailing prayers. No man may expect to receive out of the fulness that is treasured up in Christ Jesus until he is willing to confess his own poverty. Grace for grace will be given only to those who feel need upon need; all successful pleadings must find their argument in free grace. We must never urge claims against the Lord as though he were our debtor; for then mercy will not treat with us: we have appealed unto the Cæsar of justice and unto Cæsar we must go. Let us have done with merits and deserts, and let this be our cry, "For thy mercy and for thy truth's sake, and for thy Son's sake, hear thou the voice of my prayer." This is the proper gospel spirit; but if we plead in any other fashion, we shall be sent empty away.

Still, this "desire of the humble" is apt to be somewhat restricted and straitened. If we contract our desires to the measure of our deserts, they will shrivel into nothing; for our deserts are less than nothing. It is ill to pray according to your sense of what you have a right to ask. You have a legal right to ask for nothing but justice, and who among us can abide its action apart from Jesus? "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" You had better pray according to God's command, and that runs thus: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." The truest humility is that which is immediately obedient to the gracious precept, and accepts without a question that which the Lord so freely gives. We have a natural right to nothing; but when the Lord commands us to open our mouth wide, he thereby gives us a covenant right to all things. Yet, dear brother, if your humility should cramp your desire, if you feel as if you would desire a great boon but dare not, still it is a desire.

If you say, "I see the sweetness of the mercy, but it seems too good for such a soul as mine," yet I spy at the back of your humility a true and strong desire, and I pray that the Lord may hear that desire and answer thee for his mercy's sake. Forget not this first truth—that what seems to be the lowest form of prayer is, nevertheless, true prayer.

II. Our second point is full of comfort to those who have begun to pray. GOD IS QUICK TO HEAR THE LOWLIEST PRAYER: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." *This must be a divine science,*—this art of hearing desires. We have heard a good deal lately about thought-reading. I give no opinion of that matter among men; but here is a wonderful instance of it with the Lord. "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." This kind of desire-reading is the prerogative of God alone. He knows our desires even when we do not know them ourselves. Sitting in this Tabernacle you are desiring, but it is quite impossible for the person sitting next to you to know your wishes, and it is quite as well, perhaps, that it is so. Certain it is that the servant of God, Eli himself, fresh from the shrine of the Most High, could not read Hannah's desire. Her lips were moving, and one would think if anything would be learned it might be from the moving of the lips; but Eli thought her drunken, and therefore chattering to herself, and so he rebuked her. Was it not a mercy for Hannah that God heard her humble desire, and knew all about it? Beloved, the Lord is reading your thought now: my dear sister, your groaning out of the very deeps has ascended to the heights. You would not like to tell your inward feelings: perhaps your secret is too painful to be told: never mind, God's ear is so quick that he can hear your desires. Wonderful art! We should be very glad if the Lord had promised to hear us when we speak; but he has gone far beyond that, and he hears the unspeakable and unutterable. Was there ever power and pity like to this? Be comforted, you that are full of desires this morning, and are sitting here with hearts ready to break, crying in your spirit, "Oh that the Lord would hear me! Oh that he would give me peace! Oh that the days of my mourning were ended! Oh that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!" Do not sink in despair, there is no reason for fear; your case is among

the most hopeful, for it is the way of the Lord to hear the desire of the humble.

It is an art which has been exercised by God in all ages; he does not merely possess the power, but he exercises it. I like my text for putting it in the past tense: "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." It is a matter of frequent fact, and not merely a possible event. It is not the bare assertion of a power, but the record of a deed. All along through history, wherever gracious men have lived, their hearts have talked with God as well without words as with them. The pulsings of human spirits God has heard as surely as if they had been loud as the beat of drum. The sigh of the soul has come up before him as clearly as if it had been the note of a clarion. The Lord's ear is never heavy, he is not weary of the feebleness and faultiness of the poor man's petition. Still the Lord heareth in the day of trouble, and the name of the God of Jacob defends us.

"When God inclines the heart to pray,
He hath an ear to hear;
To him there's music in a groan,
And beauty in a tear."

To-day let this be told; it ought not to be buried in ungrateful silence; it is mentioned in the text, let it be mentioned in your conversation. If some here present had the opportunity, we could tell you how God has heard our desires, and how at times before the desire has actually been formed in the soul the answer has come, according to that word, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." We had a desire laid upon our heart which we never communicated to any living person except the living God, and we carried that desire in our heart for weeks and months, constantly allowing it to burn in our bosom, and frequently letting it break out in groans and broken cries: and in due time our sighing reached the heart of God. As surely as we have sown in prayer we have in due season reaped a harvest of blessing. Our Lord even in Gethsemane was heard in that he feared—sure pledge to all his redeemed that they shall be heard in their hour of darkness. Happy are they who dwell in God, for they may have what they please at the mercy-seat. Is it not written, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart"? Has it not been so with you, O ye who abide under the shadow of the Almighty? I charge you then, abundantly to utter the memory of his great goodness. Fail not to tell your experience of the Lord's faithfulness; for God loses much glory, and poor sinners and saints too, lose much encouragement to pray when children of God are silent about their success at the throne of grace. Oh, I wish I could be the means of stirring some this morning to pray the prayer of faith while sitting here. You may say, "I will pray when I get home." You may do so, if you please; but I am urging you to something more speedy. Remember the publican: it was in God's house that he prayed; though he did not dare to lift his eyes to heaven, yet he sighed in his soul this prayer,—"God be merciful to me a sinner," and he went down to his house justified rather than the other. I do not ask you to withhold that prayer till you reach home: would it not be a grand thing to be saved here, and to go home justified? You shall have that unspeakable blessing now if your

desire be a true one, and you pour it out at once before the Lord believingly. He has heard the like many times, and is prepared to hear you in the same manner. Why should not this first Sunday in October be a day of grace unto your souls? "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." This is an accepted time; the Spirit of God is near. If God is now inclining you to pray, do not resist the gentle movement of his Spirit, but let your prayer come forth, encouraged by the sweet language of my text. Say you unto the prayer-hearing God, "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble. Why shouldest thou not hear my desire at this hour, and bless me, even me also, O my Father?"

III. Thirdly, we will remark that THE HEART IS THE MAIN MATTER IN PRAYER. That is clearly shown in the text: "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble." Desires are the fruit of the heart. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." When God comes to deal with men in a way of grace, his first business is to prepare their hearts; so that most assuredly the state of the heart is of prime importance. The heart is the source, the seat, and the essence of supplication. Prayer with the heart is the heart of prayer: the cry of our soul is the soul of our cry.

Without the heart prayer is a wretched mockery. There is as much grace in the bark of a dog or the grunt of a swine as in a form of prayer if the heart be absent; and God is as likely, nay, more likely, to hear the cry of ravens and young lions, than to regard prayers uttered in chapels or churches, meeting-houses or cathedrals, if the mind be not in earnest. Do not say, "I read my collect this morning;" you may read fifty collects, and be none the better: do not say, "I went through the prayer which I learned from a godly mother;" you may go through it twenty thousand times, and yet never pray once. Unless the heart speaks with God, thou hast done nothing for thine own good with all thy paternosters or other goodly words; nay, thou mayest have done something to thine own hurt in all this pretence of praying. I fear that much so-called public prayer is nothing better than presumptuous sin. If your child should come to you and ask a favour in an affected voice, would you notice him? If, instead of saying, "Dear father, I want so-and-so," he should take up a book and intone such words as these, "Dearly beloved father, I have to request of thee that thou in thy great affection wilt give unto me such and such things," you would not regard his nonsense. You would say, "Come, boy, what do you want? Tell me plainly"; and if he continued to intone, you would drive him out of the room, perhaps with the aid of your foot. I fear that this praying in sing-song is the most fearful mockery God ever hears. Fancy Peter, when he was beginning to sink, intoning, "Lord, save me." When the heart really gets to speak with God, it cannot talk in affected tones: it throws such rubbish overboard. But cannot a man pray with his heart and yet use a written prayer? Certainly he can. Many have done so for years. If you cannot walk without your crutches, I would sooner you walked with them than not at all. Still, it is not the best words put together by the most devout men that ever lived, nor the holiest language composed extemporaneously by yourself, that can make up prayer if the heart be gone. Words are seldom more than the baggage of prayer. Language at best is but the flesh in

which prayer is embodied: the desire of the heart is the life of the prayer. See thou to thy heart, for God sees to it: "Thou wilt prepare their heart." Sometimes the Lord puts words into men's mouths: he says, "Take with you words, and come unto me," and thus he prepares words for their use; but in general the main concern with God is that the heart be prepared to plead with him.

Without the heart prayer is a nullity, and *when there is but little heart, prayer is a failure.* He that prays with little desire asks God to refuse him. If you go through your prayer, and your mind is wandering up and down about a thousand vanities, your desires are feeble, and your supplication will effect little. Prayer must be fervent to be effectual, it must be ardent to be acceptable. If the utter failure of your prayer would not greatly grieve you, and if its success would not much gratify you, then depend upon it you will have to wait long at mercy's wicket ere it will admit you. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Importunity is indispensable: our Lord has given us many parables to that effect. To play at praying will never do: heart and soul must be fully awake; for no sleepy prayer can enter heaven. We must praise God with our whole heart, and we must pray in the same manner. If a double-minded man may not expect to receive anything of the Lord, neither may a half-hearted man. Above all things, keep thine heart with all diligence if thou wouldest speed at the throne.

Success comes to the prayer of a glowing heart. When the soul grows warm, and the spirit is fervent, and desires are strong, then, brother, do not spare thy prayers. We are not always in that condition, let us pray much when we are. We are bound to prepare ourselves for prayer; but I believe the best qualifications are strong desires and intense longings. No preparation for food is equal to intense hunger. You have the best sauce with your meat when you are hungry. It will be your wisdom when your desires are sharp-set to pray more than you ordinarily do. You cannot always pray alike; but when good times come use them. When a fair wind fills the sails of desire, then make all possible headway. Set apart a longer season for private devotion when the soul is all alive and active in it. At another time you may have to try very hard and make but small progress, for the chariot wheels may be taken off: let it not at such a time be a source of regret that you wasted a happier season. Cease not to obtain blessings beyond number both for thyself, for the church, and for a perishing world; but take heed that thy heart be found greatly exercised with longings of soul before God.

IV. Fourthly, GOD HIMSELF PREPARES THE HEARTS OF HIS PEOPLE. "Thou wilt prepare their heart." I am greatly rejoiced by this statement that God will prepare our hearts to pray, because it is a most *important* business on which so much depends. On the heart the whole machinery of life depends, and it needs preparing, especially for devotion. You cannot spring out of bed and on every occasion pray in a moment without thought or reflection: you cannot say to yourself, "I have just been listening to ungodly talk; and now I am going to pray." It will be poor, pitiful praying which springs up from the barren soil of thoughtlessness. We need preparation in coming into the courts of the Lord's

house: the soul had need put her shoes from off her feet because the place is holy. But this preparation is often as *difficult* as it is needful; and therefore it is a great mercy that our God undertakes to work it in us. Surely none but the Lord can prepare a heart for prayer. One old writer says it is far harder work to raise the big bell into the steeple than to ring it afterwards. This witness is true. When the bell is well hung you can ring it readily enough; but in that uplifting of the heart lies the work and the labour. Before musicians begin to play, they attend to their strings and see that their instruments are in order; you wish that the operation could be dispensed with, but it cannot be, and it is one of the most needful parts of the musician's work. Until he has learned to tune his instrument, what does he know? Until he has tuned it, what can he do? I wish we were all made ready, as a people prepared for the Lord.

These processes by which the heart is prepared *may have commenced far back.* Our gracious God may have prepared the heart of a man to pray to-day by a work which he wrought upon him, or for him, twenty years ago: the Lord may be working a man up to a certain prayer by years of sorrow or joy. The poet who composes a sonnet may not be able to tell you why the inspiration came to him at that particular moment; for it may have been the outcome of his soul throughout the whole of his life. That which the songster threw into words to-day may have lain hidden in his soul from his boyhood. He was not prepared for penning his stanzas then, but his after-life trained him to speak in numbers, and to clothe noble thoughts in the dress of attractive language. So may it be with our prayers: they may be the juice of a life-vintage, the ripened harvest of youth and manhood. In any case, God prepares the heart to be blest when he is prepared to bless it.

One of the most difficult things in preparation for prayer is the *restraining of loose and wandering thoughts.* I do not know how perfect brethren keep themselves free from every evil thought, for I find myself defeated often when I would shut out these vile intruders. Honestly, I may express my belief that these carnal boasters have as many vain thoughts as other people. The ravenous birds will come down upon the sacrifice, even when Abraham offers it, and it costs infinite pains to drive them away. Intruding thoughts surround us like a plague of flies: they are here, and there, and everywhere. It is well, indeed, that God should prepare our hearts; for in this one point our weakness is complete. Egypt suffered from a plague of flies, which all Pharaoh's armies could not drive away; but when the Lord heard the prayer of Moses, it is said, "The Lord removed the swarms of flies: there remained not one." That was a deliverance indeed: truly this was the finger of God. When the Lord comes to prepare his people's hearts by his Spirit, he chases away every wandering thought, so that there remains not one. The tradition says of Solomon's temple that though much meat was consumed there, and this naturally attracts flies, yet there was never a fly in the holy place. I wish it were so with our holy place! O that it might be so that whenever we pray all evil thoughts may be driven out. This is a miracle, and none can perform it but the Lord our God. "Thou wilt prepare their heart."

Next, the Lord prepares his people's hearts by *giving them a deep*

sense of what they want. I know your grief, and your temptation, and your misery, and the crying out of your spirit under the lashes of conscience; but all this is right, thus you are instructed in the art and mystery of supplication. Nobody cries to Christ so well as the man who is beginning to sink. Jonah's cry in the whale's belly was the most intense prayer he ever prayed. When the iron enters into your soul, then you cry unto the Lord in your trouble. A sentence of death in your own soul is a mighty quickener of supplication; when your spirit is overwhelmed with sorrow, then look up to Christ, the Saviour, and find him to your soul's joy. Our desires are apt to sleep, but when the Lord by his Spirit reveals to us our spiritual poverty, we long, and pine, and sigh for spiritual blessings.

When a man out of the anguish of his heart cries for mercy, then he begins to search out and *lay hold upon the promise.* To bring the promise to remembrance is a part of the Holy Spirit's work: he takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. Oh, how blessedly a man can pray when he gets hold of a promise, when he is sure that God hath a blessing in store for him, when he is positive that the Lord is faithful to his covenant, and will not withhold any good thing from him. The Lord also works in us *strong faith, holy perseverance, and high expectancy,* and in all these ways he prepares our hearts to pray.

Nor is this all: the text does not say that God will only prepare the heart to pray, but it says, "Thou wilt prepare the heart," and this is a wider work, making ready for other matters besides prayer. He will prepare the heart to receive the answer, for many of us are not as yet ready to enjoy what God is ready to bestow. Do you want anything which Jesus can give you? Give your heart up to the Holy Spirit, that he may prepare you to seek the blessing, and prepare you to receive the blessing when the time comes for the Lord to grant it. "Thou wilt prepare their heart;" this is wonderful condescension on God's part, and on our part we ought to feel the utmost encouragement to prepare our own hearts for earnest supplication.

V. Lastly, PRAYER FROM PREPARED HEARTS MUST BE HEARD. "Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." I wish you would join these two sentences together in your minds, and carry them home with you. Let the two bells ring in harmony.—"Thou wilt prepare their heart: thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." Ring them over and over again; and let their blended music linger in your ear.

First, *if God has had love enough to prepare your heart to pray, he has grace enough to give you the blessing.* The more difficult thing of the two is not to give the blessing, but to prepare your heart to cry for it: if he has done the one he will certainly do the other.

Consider *the truthfulness and the faithfulness, and the goodness of God,* and you will see that it is not possible that he should teach a man to pray for a blessing which he will not give. I cannot imagine any one of you tantalising your child by exciting in him a desire that you do not intend to gratify. It were a very ungenerous thing to offer alms to the poor, and then, when they hold out their hand for it, to mock their poverty with a denial. It were a cruel addition to the miseries of the sick, if they were taken to the hospital and there left to die

untended and uncared for. Where God leads you to pray he means you to receive. You find a holy desire in your heart; the Lord put that desire into your heart, and for the honour of his infinite majesty, lest he stain his goodness and dishonour his great name, he must hear you. With what comfort would I address those here who are beginning to pray. I know I speak to some who are uneasy, unrestful; you tell us you are seeking peace, that day and night a desire for salvation occupies the entire chamber of your soul. Well, this did not come from your own nature; neither the devil nor the old Adam has taught you to pray. Dear hearer, be sure that the great Father who is moving you to cry to him is hearing you—he is inclining his ear to catch the faintest moan of your spirit. Believe that he is hearing you. Cast yourself at the feet of his dear Son. Behold the wounds of Jesus; let these invite you to draw nigh to God. I know of no such eloquent mouths as the wounds of the dying Lord. Let them persuade you to come to Jesus, to trust, to rest at his dear feet; for since he has inclined your heart to pray he is about to hear you and bless you. The Lord be with you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cii.

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DURING HIS FATHER'S ILLNESS.

WITH A PREFACE BY C. H. SPURGEON.

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JEHOVAH-JIREH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 12TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen."—Genesis xxii. 14.

"ABRAHAM called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh," or "Jehovah will see it," or "Jehovah will provide," or "Jehovah will be seen." We are offered a variety of interpretations, but the exact idea is that of seeing and being seen. For God to see is to provide. Our own word "provide," is only Latin for "to see." You know how we say that we will *see to* a matter. Possibly this expression hits the nail on the head. Our heavenly Father sees our need, and with divine foresight of love prepares the supply. He sees to a need to supply it; and in the seeing he is seen, in the providing he manifests himself.

I believe that the truth contained in the expression "Jehovah-jireh" was ruling Abraham's thought long before he uttered it and appointed it to be the memorial name of the place where the Lord had provided a substitute for Isaac. It was this thought, I think, which enabled him to act as promptly as he did under the trying circumstances. His reason whispered within him, "If you slay your son, how can God keep his promise to you that your seed shall be as many as the stars of heaven?" He answered that suggestion by saying to himself, "Jehovah will see to it!" As he went upon that painful journey, with his dearly beloved son at his side, the suggestion may have come to him, "How will you meet Sarah when you return home, having imbrued your hands in the blood of her son? How will you meet your neighbours when they hear that Abraham, who professed to be such a holy man, has killed his son?" That answer still sustained his heart—"Jehovah will see to it! Jehovah will see to it! He will not fail in his word. Perhaps he will raise my son from the dead; but in some way or other he will justify my obedience to him, and vindicate his own command. Jehovah will see to it." This was a quietus to every mistrustful thought. I pray that we may drink into this truth, and be refreshed by it. If we follow the Lord's bidding, he will see to it that we shall not be ashamed or confounded. If we come into great need by following his command,

he will see to it that the loss shall be recompensed. If our difficulties multiply and increase so that our way seems completely blocked up, Jehovah will see to it that the road shall be cleared. The Lord will see us through in the way of holiness if we are only willing to be thorough in it, and dare to follow wheresoever he leads the way. We need not wonder that Abraham should utter this truth, and attach it to the spot which was to be for ever famous: for his whole heart was saturated with it, and had been sustained by it. Wisely he makes an altar and a mountain to be memorials of the truth which had so greatly helped him. His trials had taught him more of God,—had, in fact, given him a new name for his God; and this he would not have forgotten, but he would keep it before the minds of the generations following by naming the place Jehovah-jireh.

Observe as you read this chapter that this was not the first time that Abraham had thus spoken. When he called the name of the place Jehovah-jireh he had seen it to be true,—the ram caught in the thicket had been provided as a substitute for Isaac: Jehovah had provided. But he had before declared that truth when as yet he knew nothing of the Divine action, when he could not even guess how his extraordinary trial would end. His son Isaac had said to him, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" and the afflicted father had bravely answered, "My son, God will provide." In due time God did provide, and then Abraham honoured him by saying the same words, only instead of the ordinary name for God he used the special covenant title—Jehovah. That is the only alteration; otherwise in the same terms he repeats the assurance that "the Lord will provide."

That first utterance was most remarkable: it was simple enough, but how prophetic! It teaches us this truth, that *the confident speech of a believer is akin to the language of a prophet.* The man who accepts the promise of God unstaggeringly, and is sure that it is true, will speak like the seers of old: he will see that God sees, and will declare the fact, and the holy inference which comes of it. The believer's childlike assurance will anticipate the future, and his plain statement—"God will provide"—will turn out to be literal truth. If you want to come near to prophesying, hold you hard to the promise of God and you shall "prophesy according to the measure of faith." He that can say, "I know and am sure that God will not fail me in this mine hour of tribulation," will, before long, drop pearls of divine confidence and diamonds of prediction from his lips. Choice sayings which become proverbs in the church of God are not the offspring of mistrust, but of firm confidence in the living God. To this day many a saying of a man of God is quoted among us, even as Abraham's word was quoted. Moses puts it, "As it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;" and we might mention many a sentence which is said unto this day which first fell from the mouth of a faithful spirit in the hour of the manifestation of the Lord. The speech of the father of the faithful became the speech of his spiritual seed for many a year afterwards, and it abides in the family of faith unto this day. If we have full faith in God, we shall teach succeeding generations to expect Jehovah's hand to be stretched out still.

True faith not only speaks the language of prophecy, but, *when she sees her prophecy fulfilled, faith is always delighted to raise memorials to the God of truth.* The stones which were set up of old were not to the memory of dead men, but they were memorials of the deeds of the living God: they abundantly uttered the memory of God's great goodness. Abraham on this occasion did not choose a name which recorded what *he* had done, but a name which spake of what *Jehovah* had done. It is true Abraham's faith was worthy to be remembered throughout all generations, for there he believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness, and the Lord said to him, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." There the patriarch had endured the extreme test: no gold was ever passed through a hotter furnace. But true faith is always modest; from her gate boasting is excluded by law. Abraham says nothing about himself at all, but the praise is unto God, who sees and is seen; the record is, "Jehovah will provide." I like that self-ignoring; I pray that we, also, may have so much strength of faith that self may go to the wall. Little faith is very apt to grow proud when, to its own astonishment, it has wrought righteousness; but strong faith so completely empties itself, and so entirely depends upon the all-sufficiency of God, that when anything is achieved it remembers nothing but the divine hand, and lays the crown where it ought to be laid. Growing in experimental acquaintance with the God of the covenant, faith has a new song and a new name for her God, and takes care that his wonderful works shall be remembered.

Note yet further, that when faith has uttered a prophecy, and has set up her memorial, *the record of mercy received becomes itself a new prophecy.* Abraham says, "Jehovah-jireh,—God will see to it"; what was he doing then but prophesying a second time for future ages? He bids us know that, as God had provided for him in the time of his extremity, so he will provide for all them that put their trust in him. The God of Abraham liveth, and let his name be praised, and let us rest assured that, as certainly as in the patriarch's distress, when there seemed no way of escape, the Lord appeared for him and was seen in the mount, even so shall it be with all the believing seed while time endureth. We shall all be tried and tested, but in our utmost need God will see us, and see to our deliverance, if we will but let faith have her perfect work, and will hope and quietly wait the moment when the Lord shall be seen working salvation. The Lord is the Preserver of men and the Provider for men. I long for all of us to get this truth firmly fixed in our hearts, and therefore I shall try to show that God's provision for Abraham and Isaac typified the far greater provision by which all the faithful are delivered from death; and that God, in providing in the mount, has given us therein a sure guarantee that all our necessities shall be provided for henceforth even for ever.

Consider, then, that the provision which God made for Abraham was symbolic of the greater provision which he has made for all his chosen in Christ Jesus. "Jehovah-jireh" is a text from which to preach concerning providence, and many have been the sermons which have been distilled from it; but I take the liberty of saying that providence, in the ordinary sense of the term, is not the first thought of the passage,

which should be read with some sort of reference to its connection, and the more so because that connection is exceedingly remarkable.

I. When Abraham said "Jehovah will provide," he meant us, first of all, to learn that THE PROVISION WILL COME IN THE TIME OF OUR EXTREMITY. The provision of the ram instead of Isaac was the significant type which was before Abraham's mind; but our Lord tells us, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad;" and surely if ever Abraham saw the day of Christ, and was beyond measure glad, it was at that moment when he beheld the Lord providing a substitute for Isaac. At any rate, whether Abraham understood the full meaning of what he said or not, he spoke not for himself, but for us. Every word he uttered is for our teaching, and the teaching is this: that God, in the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, made the fullest provision for our greatest needs; and from that we may infer that whatever need shall ever occur to us, God will certainly provide for it; but he may delay the actual manifestation thereof till our darkest hour has come.

> "Just in the last distressing hour
> The Lord displays delivering power;
> The mount of danger is the place
> Where we shall see surprising grace."

The Lord gave our Lord Jesus Christ to be the Substitute for men in view of the utmost need of our race. Isaac was hard pressed when God interfered in his behalf. The knife was lifted up by a resolute hand; he was within a second of death when the angelic voice said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad." God provided instantly when the need pressed urgently. Beloved, was Isaac nearer to death than sinful man was near to hell? Was that knife closer to the throat of the beloved Isaac than the axe of the executioner was near to the neck of every sinner, aye, to the neck of the whole race of man? We have so sinned and gone astray that it was not possible for God to wink at our transgressions; he must visit our iniquities with the just punishment, which is nothing less than death eternal. I constantly meet with persons under the convincing power of the Spirit of God, and I always find that in their apprehension the punishment of sin is something terrible and overwhelming. When God deals with men by his convincing Spirit, they feel that their sin deserves nothing less than the wrath of God in hell. So it was with our race; we had altogether destroyed ourselves, and were shut up under condemnation by the law, and it was in that dread hour that God interposed and proclaimed a Saviour for men. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." I would to God we all felt what a dreadful thing it is to be lost; for then we should value the provision of the Saviour much more than we do now. Oh, sirs, if no Redeemer had been provided, we might have gathered here this morning, and if you could have had patience to hear me, all I should have been able to say would have been, "Brethren, let us weep together and sigh in chorus; for we shall all die, and, dying, we shall sink into the bottomless pit, and shall abide for ever under the righteous anger of God." It must have been so with us all if a substitute had not been found. If the gift of the loving Father had not been bestowed, if Jesus had not condescended to die in our place, we must have been left for execution by that law

which will by no means spare the guilty. We talk about our salvation as if it were nothing very particular: we have heard of the plan of substitution so often that it becomes commonplace. It should not be so; I believe that it still thrills the angels with astonishment that man, when he had fallen from his high estate, and had been banished from Eden, and had become a rebel against God, should be redeemed by the blood of the Heir of all things, by whom the Divine Father made the worlds. When death and hell opened their jaws to devour, then was this miracle completed, and Jesus taken among the thorns was offered up a sacrifice for us.

God not only interposed when the death of Isaac was imminent, but also when the anguish of Abraham had reached its highest pitch. The patriarch's faith never wavered; but we must not forget that he was a man like ourselves, and no father could see his child offered up without an inward agony which surpasses all description. The anguish of so perfect a man as Abraham, a man who felt all the domestic affections intensely, as every truly godly father must feel them, and who loved his son as much as he loved his own life, must have been unspeakably great. What must have been the force of faith which enabled the man of God to master himself, to go contrary to the current of human nature, and deliberately to stand ready to sacrifice his Isaac! He must have been wound up to a fearful pitch of anguish when he lifted up the knife to slay his son; but just then the angel arrested his hand, and God provided the ram as the substitute in the moment of his utmost misery.

Surely the world had come to a great state of misery when at last God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, that he might become the sacrifice for sin. At any rate, this I know, that as a rule men do not see Christ to be their substitute nor accept him as their Redeemer till they feel that they lie at hell's door, and till their anguish on account of sin has become exceeding great. I remember well when I first beheld the lamb of God who suffered in my stead. I had often heard the story of his death; I could have told it out to others very correctly; but then I did not know my own pressing need, I had not come to feel the knife at my throat, nor was I about to die; and therefore my knowledge was a cold, inoperative thing. But when the law had bound me, and given me over to death, and my heart within me was crushed with fear, then the sight of the glorious Substitute was as bright to me as a vision of heaven. Did Jesus suffer in my stead without the gate? were my transgressions laid on him? then I received him with joy unspeakable, my whole nature accepting the good news. At this moment I accept the Lord Jesus as my Substitute with a deep, peaceful delight. Blessed be the name of Jehovah-jireh for having taken thought of me, a beggar, a wretch, a condemned criminal, and for having provided the Lamb of God whose precious blood was shed instead of mine.

II. Secondly, upon the mount THE PROVISION WAS SPONTANEOUSLY MADE for Abraham, and so was the provision which the Lord displayed in the fulness of time when he gave up his Son to die. The ram caught in the thicket was a provision which on Abraham's part was quite *unsought*. He did not fall down and pray, "O Lord, in thy tenderness provide another victim instead of my son, Isaac." Probably it never entered his mind. But God spontaneously, from the free grace

of his own heart, put the ram where Abraham found it. You and I did not pray for Christ to die. He died for us before we were born, and if he had not done so it would never have entered into our mind to ask for so great a gift. Until the Lord sought us we did not even seek to be saved by Christ, of the fact of whose death we had been made aware. Oh, no; it is not in man by nature to seek a Saviour: it is in God to give a Saviour, and then the Spirit of God sweetly inclines the heart to seek him; but this seeking comes not of man. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." It is ours to sin, it is God's to save. "We have turned every one to his own way, and *the Lord* hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Ours is the wandering, but the laying of those wanderings upon Jesus is of the Lord alone: we neither bought it, nor sought it, nor thought it.

In Abraham's case I believe it was an *unexpected* thing. He did not reckon upon any substitute for his son; he judged that he would have to die, and viewed him as already dead. As for ourselves, if God had not revealed the plan of salvation by the substitution of his only-begotten Son we should never have dreamed of it. Remember that the Son of God is one with the Father; and if the Holy Ghost had not revealed the fact that the offended God would himself bear the penalty due for the offence, it would never have occurred to the human mind. The brightest of the spirits before God's throne would never have devised the plan of salvation by the sacrifice of Jesus. It was unexpected. Let us bless the Lord, who has done for us exceeding abundantly above what we asked or even thought in giving to us redemption through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I may say of Christ what I could not have said of Abraham's ram, that not only was he unsought for by us and unexpected, but now that he is given he is *not perfectly comprehended.*

> "Much we talk of Jesu's blood,
> But how little's understood!
> Of his sufferings, so intense,
> Angels have no perfect sense."

I am often ready to beat upon my own breast as I study the wondrous mystery of atoning love; for it seems to me so mean a thing to be so little affected by such boundless grace. If we fully felt what God has done for us in the great deed of Jesus' death, it might not be wonderful if we were to die under the amazing discovery. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." The immortal God undertakes to bear death for man! The immaculate stands in the sinner's place. The well-pleasing Son is made accursed for those who else had been accursed for ever. He who was above all shame and sorrow laid aside his glory and became the "Man of Sorrows," "despised and rejected of men." "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor." It is more extraordinary than romance! Poets may sing their loftiest stanzas, but they shall never reach the height of this great argument. "Paradise Lost" a Milton may compose, and fascinate a world with his majestic lines; but Paradise Restored by the divine substitution is not to be fully sung by mortal mind. God

only knows the love of God. All the harps of redeemed men and all the hymns of adoring angels can never set forth the splendour of the love of Jehovah in providing for our need, providing for our salvation, providing his only-begotten Son, and providing him of his own free love, unsought, and undesired of men.

III. But, thirdly, we ought to dwell very long and earnestly upon the fact that for man's need THE PROVISION WAS MADE BY GOD HIMSELF. The text says, "Jehovah-jireh," the *Lord* will see to it, the *Lord* will provide. None else could have provided a ransom. Neither on earth nor in heaven was there found any helper for lost humanity. What sacrifice could be presented to God if a sacrifice could be accepted? Behold Lebanon, as it rises majestically toward heaven, white with its snows; see the forests which adorn its sides! Set these all on fire, and see them blaze as the wood of the altar of God. Yet "Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering." Take the myriads of cattle that roam the hills, and shed their blood till you have made a sea of gore, but what of that? "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Men may themselves die, but in death each man who dies only pays his own debt to nature; there is nothing left for another. "None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." Where shall a redemption be found by which it shall be possible that the multitude of the elect shall be effectually redeemed from death and hell? Such a ransom could only be found by God, and he could only find it in himself,—in him who was one with himself, who lay in the bosom of the Father from old eternity. The provision was made by God himself, since none other could provide. God alone could say, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."

But was it not singular that the Lord Jehovah should provide it? When law has been broken, and its honour has to be retrieved, it would not be judged likely that the aggrieved party should make the sacrifice. That God, against whom all the blasphemy and sin and wickedness of a ribald world was aimed, shall he himself make expiation? Shall the judge bear the penalty due to the criminal? "Lay it on the sinner; for it is his due"; so justice cries aloud,—"Lay the penalty on the transgressor"; but if a substitute can be permitted, where can one be found able and willing to become surety for the guilty? Found upon the throne! Found in the majesty that is offended! Brethren, I am beaten down by my subject; forgive me that I cannot speak of it as I would desire. There is no room here for words; it is a matter for silent thought. We want the fact of substitution to strike us, and then the cross will grow sublimely great. In vision I behold it! Its two arms are extended right and left till they touch the east and west and overshadow all races of men; the foot of it descends lower than the grave, till it goes down even to the gates of hell; while upward the cross mounts with a halo round about it of unutterable glory, till it rises above the stars, and sheds its light upon the throne of the Most High. Atonement is a divine business; its sacrifice is infinite, even as the God who conceived it. Glory be to his name for ever! It is all that I can say. It was nothing less than a stretch of divine love for Jesus to give himself for our sins. It was gracious for the

Infinite to conceive of such a thing; but for him to carry it out was glorious beyond all. What shall I say of it?

I will only interject this thought here—let none of us ever interfere with the provision of God. If in our dire distress he alone was our Jehovah-jireh, and provided for us a Substitute, let us not think that there is anything left for us to provide. O sinner, do you cry, "Lord, I must have a broken heart"? He will provide it for thee. Do you cry, "Lord, I cannot master sin, I have not the power to conquer my passions"? He will provide strength for thee. Do you mourn, "Lord, I shall never hold on and hold out to the end. I am so fickle"? Then he will provide perseverance for thee. Dost thou think that after having given his own dear Son to purchase thee he will let that work fail because *thou* canst not provide some little odds and ends to complete the work? Oh, dream not so; dote not on such a folly. Whatever thou wantest, poor sinner, if thou believest in Christ the Lord's provision of a Saviour in Christ warrants thy believing that God will provide it. Salvation begins with Jehovah-jireh, the cross and the bleeding Saviour; dost thou think it will afterwards drivel down into thy providing this and that? Oh, thy pride! Thy insane pride! Thou art to do something, art thou? What! and yoke thy little something with the Eternal God? Didst thou ever hear of an angel failing to perform a duty until he was assisted by an emmet? Hast thou ever heard of God's great laws of nature breaking down till some child's finger could supplement their force? Thou to help thy God to provide! Get thee out of the way, and be nothing; then shall God come in and be everything. Sink! It is the Lord that must rise. *He* shall be seen in the mount, and not thyself. Hide thyself, and let the glory of the Lord be manifested in thee. I wish that every troubled one here could catch this idea, and hold it fast. Whatever you want to put away your sin, whatever you want to make you a new creature, whatever you want to carry you to heaven, Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide it. He will see to it. Trust thou in him, and ere long thou shalt see the divine provision, and Jehovah shall be glorious in thine eyes.

IV. But I must pass on. That which God prepares for poor sinners is A PROVISION MOST GLORIOUSLY MADE. God provided a ram instead of Isaac. This was sufficient for the occasion as a type; but that which was typified by the ram is infinitely more glorious. In order to save us God provided *God*. I cannot put it more simply. He did not provide an angel, nor a mere man, but God himself. Come, sinner, with all thy load of sin: God can bear it; the shoulders that bear up the universe can well sustain thy load of guilt. God gave thee his Godhead to be thy Saviour when he gave thee his Son.

But he also gave in the person of Christ *perfect manhood*,—such a man as never lived before, eclipsing even the perfection of the first Adam in the garden by the majestic innocence of his nature. When Jesus has been viewed as man, even unconverted men have so admired his excellence that they have almost adored him. Jesus is God and man, and the Father has given that man, that God, to be thy Redeemer. For thy redemption the Lord God has given thee the death of Christ; and what a death it was! I would that troubled hearts would oftener study the story of the Great Sacrifice, the agony

and bloody sweat, the betrayal in the garden, the binding of the hands, the accusation of the innocent, the scourging, the thorn-crowning, the spitting in the face, the mockery, the nailing to the tree, the lifting up of the cross, the burning fever, the parching thirst, and, above all, the overpowering anguish of being forsaken of his God. Bethink thee, O soul, that to save thee the Son of God must cry, "Lama sabachthani!" Bethink thee that to save thee he must hang naked to his shame between heaven and earth, rejected of both; must cry, "I thirst," and receive nothing but vinegar wherewith to moisten his burning lips. Jesus must "pour out his soul unto death" that we might live. He must be "numbered with the transgressors," that we might be numbered with his saints in glory everlasting. Was not this a glorious provision? What greater gift could be bestowed than one in whom God and man are blended in one?

When Abraham on the mount offered a sacrifice it was called a "burnt offering"; but when the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary died it was not only a burnt offering, but a sin offering, a meat offering, and a peace offering, and every other kind of sacrifice in one. Under the oldest of all dispensations, before the mosaic economy, God had not taught to men the distinctions of sacrifice, but an offering unto the Lord meant all that was afterwards set forth by many types. When the venerable patriarch offered a sacrifice, it was an offering for sin, and a sweet smelling savour besides. So was it with our Lord Jesus Christ. When he died he made his soul an offering for sin, and "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." When he died, he *also* offered unto God a burnt offering, for we read, "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour." When Jesus died he gave to us a peace offering; for we come to feast upon him with God, and to us "his flesh is meat indeed, his blood is drink indeed." One would need many a day in which to expatiate upon the infinite virtues and excellencies of Christ, in whom all perfections are sweetly hived. Blessed be his name, God has most gloriously provided for us in the day of our need. Jehovah-jireh!

V. Fifthly, THE PROVISION WAS MADE EFFECTIVELY. Isaac did not die; the laughter in Abraham's house was not stifled; there was no grief for the patriarch; he went home with his son in happy companionship, because Jehovah had provided himself a lamb for a burnt offering. The ram which was provided did not bleed in vain; Isaac did not die as well as the ram; Abraham did not have to slay the God-provided victim and his own son also. No, the one sacrifice sufficed. Beloved, this is my comfort in the death of Christ—I hope it is yours,—that he did not die in vain. I have heard of a theology which, in its attempt to extol the efficacy of Christ's death, virtually deprives it of any certain efficiency; the result of the atonement is made to depend entirely upon the will of man, and so is left to hap-hazard. Our Lord, according to certain teachers, might or might not see of the travail of his soul. I confess that I do not believe in this random redemption, and I wonder that any persons can derive comfort from such teaching. I believe that the Son of God could not possibly have come into the world in the circumstances in which he did come, and could not have died as he did

die, and yet be defeated and disappointed. He died for those who believe in him, and these shall live, yea, they *do* live in him.

I should think that Isaac, the child of laughter, was solemnly joyous as he descended the hill and went home with his father. Methinks both of them tripped along with happy step towards Sarah's house and their own loved home; and you and I this day may go home with like joyousness. We shall not die, for the Lamb of God has died for us. We shall never perish, for he has suffered in our stead. We were bound on the altar, we were laid on the wood, and the fire was ready for our consuming; but no knife shall touch us now, for the sacrifice is offered once for all. No fire shall consume us, for he who suffered in our stead has borne the heat of the flame on our behalf. We live, and we shall live. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." This is an effectual and precious providing. I do not believe in a redemption which did not redeem, nor in an atonement which did not atone; but I do believe in him who died in vain for none, but will effectually save his own church and his own sheep for whom he laid down his life. To him we will all render praise, for he was slain, and he has redeemed us unto God by his blood out of every kindred and people and nation.

VI. Turn we then, sixthly, to this note, that we may well glorify Jehovah-jireh because THIS PROVISION WAS MADE FOR EVERY BELIEVER. The provision on the Mount of Moriah was made on behalf of Abraham: he was himself a man of faith, and he is styled the "father of the faithful"; and now every faithful or believing one may stand where Abraham stood, and say, "Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide." Remember, however, that our faith must be of the same nature as that of Abraham, or it will not be counted to us for righteousness. Abraham's faith worked by love; it so worked in him that he was willing to do all that the Lord bade him, even to the sacrifice of his own dear son. You must possess a living, working, self-sacrificing faith if you would be saved. If you have it, you may be as sure that you are saved as you are sure that you have sinned. "He that believeth on him is not condemned," because Christ was condemned for him. "He that believeth on him hath everlasting life:" he cannot die, for Christ died for him. The great principle upon which our security is based is the righteousness of God, which assures us that he will not punish the substitute and then punish the person for whom the substitute endured the penalty. It were a matter of gross injustice if the sinner, having made atonement for his sin in the person of his covenant Head, the Lord Jesus, should afterwards himself be called upon to account for the very sin which was atoned for. Sin, like anything else, cannot be in two places at once: if the great God took my sin, and laid it on his Son, then it is not on me any more. If Jesus bore the wrath of God for me, I cannot bear that wrath; it were contrary to every principle of a just moral government that the Judge should cast our Surety into prison and exact the penalty of him, and then come upon those for whom the suretyship was undertaken. By this gospel I am prepared to stand or fall; yea, by it I will live or die: I know no other. Because I believe it, I this day cry from the bottom of my heart, "Jehovah-jireh," the Lord has provided an effectual redemption for all those who put

their trust in him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation. It is true, as it is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." It is true that the faith which worketh by love brings justification to the soul.

VII. But now I close with a remark which will reveal the far-reaching character of my text. "Jehovah-jireh" is true concerning all necessary things. The instance given of Abraham being provided for shows us that the Lord will ever be a Provider for his people. As to the gift of the Lord Jesus, this is A PROVISION WHICH GUARANTEES ALL OTHER PROVISION. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Abraham learned that; for, as soon as he had slaughtered the ram, the covenant was repeated in his ears, and repeated as he had never heard it before,—accompanied with an oath. God cannot swear by any greater than himself, and so he said, "By myself have I sworn." Thus was the covenant ratified by blood and by the oath of God. Oh, that bleeding Sacrifice! The covenant of God is confirmed by it, and our faith is established. If you have seen Jesus die for you, your heart has heard God swear, "Surely in blessing I will bless thee!" By two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie, he hath given us strong consolation who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us in the gospel. Let us fall back on this eternal verity, that if God has provided his own Well-beloved Son to meet the most awful of all necessities, then he will provide for us in everything else.

Where will he provide? He will provide for us *in the mount*, that is to say, in the place of our trial. When we reach the place where the fatal deed of utmost obedience is to be wrought, then God will interpose. You desire him to provide for you when you lift up your eyes and see the mount afar off. He does not choose so to do; but in the mount it shall be seen, in the place of the trial, in the heat of the furnace, in the last extremity Jehovah will be seen, for he will see to it, and it shall become a proverb with you,—"In the mount Jehovah shall be seen." That is to say, when you cannot see, the Lord will see you and see to your need; for his eyes are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. You will not need to explain to God your difficulties and the intricacies of your position, he will see it all. Joyfully sing that revival ditty—

"This my Father knows."

As soon as the Lord has seen our need, then his provision shall be seen. You need not climb to heaven or descend into the deep to find it: the Lord's provision is near at hand,—the ram in the thicket is behind you though you see it not as yet. When you have heard God speak to you, you shall turn and see it, and wonder you never saw it before. You will heartily bless God for the abundant provision which he reveals in the moment of trial. Then shall the Lord himself be seen. You will soon die, and perhaps in dying you will be troubled by the fear of death; but let that evil be removed by this knowledge—that the Lord will yet be seen, and when he shall appear you shall be manifested in his glory. In the day of the revelation of the Lord Jesus your body shall be raised from the dead, and then shall the divine provision yet more

fully be discovered. "In the mount it shall be seen," and there shall God himself be manifested to you, for your eyes shall behold him and not another.

There is a rendering given to my text which we cannot quite pass over. Some read it that "in the mount the people shall be seen,"—in that mount in years to come the multitude would gather to worship God. God's presence was in the temple which was built upon that spot, and thither the tribes went up, the tribes of the Lord to worship the Most High. I dwell in a house not made with hands, but piled by God of solid slabs of mercy. He is building for me a palace of crystal, pure and shining, transparent as the day. I see the house in which I am to abide for ever gradually growing around me. Its foundation was laid of old, in eternal love,—"in the mount it shall be seen." The Lord provided for me a Covenant Head, a Redeemer, and a Friend, and in him I abide. Since then, course upon course of the precious stones of loving-kindness has been laid, and the jewelled walls are all around me. Has it not been so with you? By-and-by we shall be roofed in with glory everlasting, and then as we shall look to the foundations, and the walls, and to the arch above our head, we shall shout, "Jehovah-jireh,"—God has provided all this for me! How we shall rejoice in every stone of the divine building! How will our memory think over the method of the building! On such a day was that stone laid, I remember it right well: "I was sore sick and the Lord comforted me." On such a day was that other stone laid,—I was in prison spiritually, and the heavenly visitor came unto me. On such another day was that be-jewelled course completed, for my heart was glad in the Lord and my glory rejoiced in the God of my salvation. The walls of love are still rising, and when the building is finished and the topstone is brought out with shoutings of "Grace, grace, unto it!" we shall then sing this song unto the Lord—JEHOVAH-JIREH! The Lord has provided it. From the beginning to the end there is nothing of man and nothing of merit, nothing of self, but all of God in Christ Jesus, who hath loved us with an everlasting love, and therefore hath abounded towards us in blessing according to the fulness of his infinite heart. To him be praise world without end. Amen, and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis xxii. 1—19.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—426, 226, 199.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OBADIAH; OR, EARLY PIETY EMINENT PIETY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 19TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth."—1 Kings xviii. 12.

I SUSPECT that Elijah did not think very much of Obadiah. He does not treat him with any great consideration, but addresses him more sharply than one would expect from a fellow-believer. Elijah was the man of action—bold, always to the front, with nothing to conceal; Obadiah was a quiet believer, true and steadfast, but in a very difficult position, and therefore driven to perform his duty in a less open manner. His faith in the Lord swayed his life, but did not drive him out of the court. I notice that even after Elijah had learned more of him at this interview, he speaks concerning God's people as if he did not reckon much upon Obadiah, and others like him. He says, "They have thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." He knew very well that Obadiah was left, who, though not exactly a prophet, was a man of mark; but he seems to ignore him as if he were of small account in the great struggle. I suppose it was because this man of iron, this prophet of fire and thunder, this mighty servant of the Most High, set small store by anybody who did not come to the front and fight like himself. I know it is the tendency of brave and zealous minds somewhat to undervalue quiet, retired piety. True and accepted servants of God may be doing their best under great disadvantages, against fierce opposition, but they may scarcely be known, and may even shun the least recognition; therefore men who live in the fierce light of public life are apt to underestimate them. These minor stars are lost in the brilliance of the man whom God lights up like a new sun to flame through the darkness. Elijah flashed over the sky of Israel like a thunderbolt from the hand of the Eternal, and naturally he would be somewhat impatient of those whose movements were slower and less conspicuous. It is Martha and Mary over again, in some respects.

The Lord does not love that his servants, however great they are, should think lightly of their lesser comrades, and it occurs to me that he so arranged matters that Obadiah became important to Elijah when

he had to face the wrathful king of Israel. The prophet is bidden to go and show himself to Ahab, and he does so; but he judges it better to begin by showing himself to the governor of his palace, that he may break the news to his master, and prepare him for the interview. Ahab was exasperated by the terrible results of the long drought, and might in his sudden fury attempt to kill the prophet; and so he is to have time for consideration, that he may cool down a little.

Elijah has an interview with Obadiah, and bids him go and say to Ahab, "Behold Elijah." It may sometimes be the nearest way to our object to go a little round about. But it is remarkable that Obadiah should thus be made useful to a man so much his superior. He who never feared the face of kings nevertheless found himself using as his helper a far more timid individual. The Lord may put you, my dear brother, who are so eminent, so useful, so brave, perhaps, so severe, into a position in which the humbler and more retiring believer, who has not half the grace, nor half the courage that you have, may, nevertheless, become important to your mission; and when he does this he would have you learn the lesson, and learn it well, that the Lord has a place for all his servants, and that he would not have us despise the least of them, but value them, and cherish the good that is in them. The head must not say to the foot, I have no need of thee. Those members of the mystical body which are weakest are yet necessary to the whole fabric. The Lord does not despise the day of small things, neither will he have his people do so. Elijah must not deal harshly with Obadiah. I would that Obadiah had had more courage: I wish that he had testified for the Lord, his God, as openly as Elijah did; but still every man in his own order; to his own master every servant must stand or fall. All lights are not moons, some are only stars; and even one star differeth from another star in glory. God hath his praise out of the least known of the holy characters of Scripture; even as the night hath its light out of those glimmering bodies which cannot be discerned as separate stars, but are portions of nebulous masses in which myriads of far-off lights are melted into one.

We learn further from the narrative before us, that God will never leave himself without witnesses in this world. Aye, and he will not leave himself without witnesses in the worst places of the world. What a horrible abode for a true believer Ahab's court must have been! If there had been no sinner there but that woman Jezebel, she was enough to make the palace a sink of iniquity. That strong-minded, proud, Sidonian Queen twisted poor Ahab round her fingers just as she pleased. He might never have been the persecutor he was if his wife had not stirred him up; but she hated the worship of Jehovah intensely, and despised the homeliness of Israel in comparison with the more pompous style of Sidon. Ahab must yield to her imperious demands, for she would brook no contradiction, and when her proud spirit was roused she defied all opposition. Yet in that very court where Jezebel was mistress, the chamberlain was a man who feared God greatly. Never be surprised to meet with a believer anywhere. Grace can live where you would never expect to see it survive for an hour.

Joseph feared God in the court of Pharaoh, Daniel was a trusted counsellor of Nebuchadnezzar, Mordecai waited at the gate of Ahasuerus,

Pilate's wife pleaded for the life of Jesus, and there were saints in Cæsar's household. Think of finding diamonds of the first water on such a dunghill as Nero's palace. Those who feared God in Rome were not only Christians, but they were ensamples to all other Christians for their brotherly love and generosity. Surely there is no place in this land where there is not some light: the darkest cavern of iniquity has its torch. Be not afraid; you may find followers of Jesus in the precincts of Pandemonium. In the palace of Ahab you meet an Obadiah who rejoices to hold fellowship with despised saints, and quits the levees of a monarch for the hiding places of persecuted ministers.

I notice that these witnesses for God are very often persons converted in their youth. He seems to take a delight to make these his special standard-bearers in the day of battle. Look at Samuel! When all Israel became disgusted with the wickedness of Eli's sons the child Samuel ministered before the Lord. Look at David! When he is but a shepherd boy he wakes the echoes of the lone hills with his psalms and the accompanying music of his harp. See Josiah! When Israel had revolted it was a child, Josiah by name, that broke down the altars of Baal and burned the bones of his priests. Daniel was but a youth when he took his stand for purity and God. The Lord hath to-day—I know not where—some little Luther on his mother's knee, some young Calvin learning in our Sunday-school, some youthful Zwingle singing a hymn to Jesus. This age may grow worse and worse; I sometimes think it will, for many signs look that way; but the Lord is preparing for it. The days are dark and ominous; and this eventide may darken down into a blacker night than has been known before; but God's cause is safe in God's hands. His work will not tarry for want of men. Put not forth the hand of Uzzah to steady the ark of the Lord; it shall go safely on in God's predestined way. Christ will not fail nor be discouraged. God buries his workmen, but his work lives on. If there be not in the palace a king who honours God, there shall yet be found there a governor who fears the Lord from his youth, who shall take care of the Lord's prophets, and hide them away till better days shall come. Wherefore be of good courage, and look for happier hours. Nothing of real value is in jeopardy while Jehovah is on the throne. The Lord's reserves are coming up, and their drums beat victory.

Concerning Obadiah I wish to speak with you this morning. His piety is the subject of discourse, and we wish to use it for stimulating the zeal of those who teach the young.

I. First, we shall notice that Obadiah possessed EARLY PIETY—"I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." Oh that all our youth who may grow up to manhood and womanhood may be able to say the same. Happy are the people who are in such a case!

How Obadiah came to fear the Lord in youth we cannot tell. The instructor by whom he was led to faith in Jehovah is not mentioned. Yet we may reasonably conclude that he had believing parents. Slender as the ground may seem to be, I think it is pretty firm, when I remind you of *his name*. This would very naturally be given him by his father or his mother, and as it signifies "the servant of Jehovah" I should think it indicated his parents' piety. In the days when there was persecution everywhere against the faithful, and the name of

Jehovah was in contempt because the calves of Bethel and the images of Baal were set up everywhere, I do not think that unbelieving parents would have given to their child the name of "The servant of Jehovah" if they themselves had not felt a reverence for the Lord. They would not idly have courted the remarks of their idolatrous neighbours, and the enmity of the great. In a time when names meant something, they would have called him "The child of Baal," or "The servant of Chemosh," or some other name expressive of reverence to the popular gods, if the fear of God had not been before their eyes. The selection of such a name betrays to me their earnest desire that their boy might grow up to serve Jehovah, and never bow his knee before the abhorred idols of the Sidonian Queen. Whether this be so or not, it is quite certain that thousands of the most intelligent believers owe their first bent towards godliness to the sweet associations of home. How many of us might well have borne some such a name as that of Obadiah; for no sooner did we see the light than our parents tried to enlighten us with the truth. We were consecrated to the service of God before we knew that there was a God. Many a tear of earnest prayer fell on our infant brow and sealed us for heaven; we were nursed in the atmosphere of devotion; there was scarce a day in which we were not urged to be faithful servants of God, and entreated while we were yet young to seek Jesus and give our hearts to him. Oh, what we owe, many of us, to the providence which gave us such a happy parentage! Blessed be God for his great mercy to the children of his chosen!

If he had no gracious parents, I cannot tell how Obadiah came to be a believer in the Lord in those sad days, unless he fell in with some kind teacher, tender nurse, or perhaps good servant in his father's house, or pious neighbour, who dared to gather little children round about him and tell of the Lord God of Israel. Some holy woman may have instilled the law of the Lord into his young mind before the priests of Baal could poison him with their falsehoods. No mention is made of anybody in connection with this man's conversion in his youth, and it does not matter: does it? You and I do not want to be mentioned if we are right-hearted servants of God. Not unto us be the glory. If souls are saved, God has the honour of it. He knows what instrument he used, and as he knows it, that is enough. The favour of God is fame enough for a believer. All the blasts of fame's brazen trumpet are but so much wasted wind compared with that one sentence from the mouth of God, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Go on, dear teachers: since you are called to the sacred ministry of instructing the young, do not grow weary of it. Go on, though you may be unknown, for your seed sown in the darkness shall be reaped in the light. You may be teaching an Obadiah, whose name shall be heard in future years; you are providing a father for the church, and a benefactor for the world. Though your name be forgotten, your work shall not be. When that illustrious day shall dawn, compared with which all other days are dim, when the unknown shall be made known to the assembled universe, what you have spoken in darkness shall be declared in the light.

If it was not in this way that Obadiah was brought to fear the Lord in his youth, we may think of methods such as the Lord deviseth for the

bringing in of his banished. I have been very pleased lately, when I have been seeing enquirers, to talk with several young persons who have come out from utterly worldly families. I put to them the question, "Is your father a member of a Christian church?" The answer has been a shake of the head. "Does he attend a place of worship?" "No, sir, I never knew him to go to one." "Your mother?" "Mother does not care about religion." "Have you any brother or sister like-minded with yourself?" "No, sir." "Have you any single relative who knows the Lord?" "No, sir." "Were you brought up by anyone who led you to attend the means of grace and urged you to believe on the Lord Jesus?" "No, sir, and yet from my childhood I have always had a desire to know the Lord." Is it not remarkable that it should be so? What a wonderful proof of the election of grace! Here is one taken out of a family while all the rest are left; what say you to this? Here is one called in early childhood and prompted by the secret whispers of the Spirit of God to seek after the Lord while all the rest of the family slumber in midnight darkness. If that is your case, dear friend, magnify the sovereignty of God and adore him as long as you live, for "he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy."

Still, I take it, the major part of those who come to know the Lord in their youth are persons who have had the advantage of godly parents and holy training. Let us persevere in the use of those means which the Lord ordinarily uses, for this is the way of wisdom and duty.

This early piety of Obadiah's *had special marks of genuineness about it.* The way in which he described it is, to my mind, very instructive, "I thy servant *fear the Lord* from my youth." I hardly remember in all my life to have heard the piety of children described in ordinary conversation by this term, though it is the common word of the Scriptures. *We* say, "The dear child loved God." We talk of their "being made so happy," and so forth, and I do not question the rightness of the language; still, the Holy Spirit speaks of "the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom;" and David says, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Children will get great joy through faith in the Lord Jesus; but that joy, if true, is full of lowly reverence and awe of the Lord. Joy may be the sweet fruit of the Spirit, but it also may be an excitement of the flesh; for you remember that they upon the stony ground, which had not much depth of earth, received the word with joy, and the seed sprang up immediately; but as they had no root, they withered when the sun was risen with burning heat. We cannot consider the exhilaration with which hearts receive the novelty of the gospel to be the very best and surest sign of grace. Again, we are pleased with children when we see in them much knowledge of the things of God, for in any case such knowledge is most desirable; yet it is not conclusive evidence of conversion. Of course that knowledge may be a divine fruit; if they are taught of the Spirit of God it is indeed well with them: but as it is more than possible that we ourselves may know the Scriptures and understand the whole theory of the gospel and yet may not be saved, the like may be true in the case of our youth. The fear of God which is so often neglected is one of the best evidences of sincere piety. We are to work out our own salvation

with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us. When either child or adult has the fear of God before his eyes, this is the finger of God. By this we do not mean the servile fear which worketh dread and bondage, but that holy fear which pays reverence before the majesty of the Most High, and has a high esteem of all things sacred, because God is great, and greatly to be praised. Above all things young people need a dread of doing wrong, tenderness of conscience, and anxiety of spirit to please God. Such a principle is a sure work of grace, and a surer proof of the work of the Holy Ghost than all the joy a child can feel, or all the knowledge it can acquire. I ask all teachers of the young to look well to this. There is a growing flightiness about the religion of the present day which makes me tremble. I cannot endure the religion which swims only in boiling water and breathes only in heated air. To me the whisper of the Spirit has no relationship to a brass band, much less does godliness treat the great God and the Holy Saviour as matters for irreverent clamour. The deep-seated fear of the Lord is what is wanted, whether in old or young: it is better to tremble at the word of the Lord, and to bow before the infinite majesty of divine love, than to shout oneself hoarse. O that we had more of the stern righteousness of the Puritans, or of the inner feeling of the olden Friends. Men nowadays put on their shoes and stamp and kick, and few seem to feel the power of that command, given of old to Moses, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The truth of God is not meant to inflate us, but to humble us before the throne. Obadiah had early piety of the right kind.

Beloved, you do not need that I should at this point speak to you at large upon *the advantages of early piety*. I will, therefore, only sum them up in a few sentences. To be a believer in God early in life is to be saved from a thousand regrets. Such a man shall never have to say that he carries in his bones the sins of his youth. Early piety helps us to form associations for the rest of life which will prove helpful, and it saves us from those which are harmful. The Christian young man will not fall into the common sins of young men, and injure his constitution by excesses. He will be likely to be married to a Christian woman, and so to have a holy companion in his march towards heaven. He will select as his associates those who will be his friends in the church and not in the tavern; his helpers in virtue, and not his tempters to vice. Depend upon it, a great deal depends upon whom we choose for our companions when we begin life. If we start in bad company, it is very hard to break away from it. The man brought to Christ early in life has this further advantage, that he is helped to form holy habits, and he is saved from being the slave of their opposites. Habits soon become a second nature; to form new ones is hard work; but those formed in youth remain in old age. There is something in that verse,—

> "'Tis easier work if we begin
> To serve the Lord betimes;
> But sinners who grow old in sin
> Are hardened in their crimes."

I am sure it is so. Moreover, I notice that, very frequently, those who are brought to Christ whilst young grow in grace more rapidly and

readily than others do. They have not so much to unlearn, and they have not such a heavy weight of old memories to carry. The scars and bleeding sores which come of having spent years in the service of the devil are missed by those whom the Lord brings into his church before they have wandered far into the world.

As to early piety in its bearing upon others, I cannot too highly commend it. How attractive it is! Grace looks loveliest in youth. That which would not be noticed in the grown-up man, strikes at once the most careless observer when seen in a child. Grace in a child has a convincing force: the infidel drops his weapon and admires. A word spoken by a child abides in the memory, and its artless accents touch the heart. Where the minister's sermon fails, the child's prayer may gain the victory. Moreover, religion in children suggests encouragement to those of riper years; for others seeing the little one saved say to themselves, "Why should not we also find the Lord?" By a certain secret power it opens closed doors, and turns the key in the lock of unbelief. Where nothing else could win a way for truth, a child's love has done it. It is still true, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." Go on, go on, dear teachers, to promote this most precious of all things beneath the sky, true religion in the heart—especially in the heart of the young.

I have taken up, perhaps, too much time upon this early piety, and therefore I will only give you hints, in the next place, as to its results:

II. Youthful piety leads on to PERSEVERING PIETY. Obadiah could say, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." Time had not changed him: whatever his age may have been, his religion had not decayed. We are all fond of novelty, and I have known some men go wrong as it were for a change. It is not burning quick to the death in martyrdom that is the hard work; roasting before a slow fire is a far more terrible test of firmness. To continue gracious during a long life of temptation is to be gracious indeed. For the grace of God to convert a man like Paul, who is full of threatenings against the saints, is a great marvel, but for the grace of God to preserve a believer for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, is quite as great a miracle, and deserves more of our praise than it usually commands. Obadiah was not affected by the lapse of time; he was found to be when old what he was when young.

Nor was he carried away by the fashion of those evil times. To be a servant of Jehovah was thought to be a mean thing, old-fashioned, ignorant, a thing of the past; the worship of Baal was the "modern thought" of the hour. All the court walked after the God of Sidon, and all the courtiers went in the same way. My lord worshipped Baal, and my lady worshipped Baal, for the queen worshipped Baal; but Obadiah said, "I thy servant fear Jehovah from my youth." Blessed is the man who cares nothing for the fashion, for it passeth away. If for a while it rageth towards evil, what hath the believing man to do but to abide steadfastly by the right? Obadiah was not even affected by the absence of the means of grace. The priests and Levites had fled into Judah, and the prophets had been killed or hidden away, and there was no public worship of Jehovah in Israel. The temple was far away at Jeru-

salem; therefore he had no opportunity of hearing anything that could strengthen him or stimulate him; yet he held on his way. I wonder how long some professors would keep up their profession if there were no places of worship, no Christian associations, no ministrations of the word; but this man's fear of the Lord was so deep that the absence of that which is usually wanted for the sustenance of piety did not cause him to decline. May you and I personally feed upon the Lord Jesus in the secret of our souls, so that we may flourish even though we should be far removed from a profitable ministry. May the Holy Ghost make us steadfast, unmovable evermore.

Added to this, there were the difficulties of his position. He was chamberlain of the palace. If he had pleased Jezebel and worshipped Baal he might have been much easier in his situation, for he would have enjoyed her royal patronage; but there he was, governor in Ahab's house, and yet fearing Jehovah. He must have had to walk very delicately, and watch his words most carefully. I do not wonder that he became a very cautious person, and was a little afraid even of Elijah, lest he was giving him a commission which would lead to his destruction. He came to be extremely prudent, and looked on things round about so as neither to compromise his conscience nor jeopardise his position. It wants an uncommonly wise man to do that, but he who can accomplish it is to be commended. He did not run away from his position, nor retreat from his religion. If he had been forced to do wrong, I am sure he would have imitated the priests and Levites and have fled into Judah, where the worship of Jehovah continued; but he felt that without yielding to idolatry he could do something for God in his advantageous position, and therefore he determined to stop and fight it out. When there is no hope of victory you may as well retire; but he is the brave man who when the bugle sounds retreat does not hear it, who puts his blind eye to the telescope and cannot see the signal to cease firing, but just holds his position against all odds, and does all the damage he can to the enemy. Obadiah was a man who did in truth "hold the fort," for he felt that when all the prophets were doomed by Jezebel it was his part to stay near the tigress and save the lives of at least a hundred servants of God from her cruel power. If he could not do more he would not have lived in vain if he accomplished so much. I admire the man whose decision was equal to his prudence, though I should greatly fear to occupy so perilous a place. His course was something like walking on the tight rope with Blondin. I should not like to try it myself, nor would I recommend any of you to attempt a feat so difficult. The part of Elijah is much safer and grander. The prophet's course was plain enough; he had not to please, but to reprove Ahab; he had not to be wary, but to act in a bold outspoken manner for the God of Israel. How much the greater man he seems to be when the two stand together in the scene before us. Obadiah falls on his face and calls him "My lord Elijah;" and well he might, for morally he was far his inferior. Yet I must not fall into Elijah's vein myself lest I have to pull myself up with a sharp check. It was a great thing for Obadiah that he could manage Ahab's household with Jezebel in it, and yet, for all that, win this commendation from the Spirit of God, that *he feared the Lord greatly.*

He persevered, too, notwithstanding his success in life; and that I hold to be much to his credit. There is nothing more perilous to a man than to prosper in this world and become rich and respectable. Of course we desire it, wish for it, strive for it; but how many in winning it have lost all, as to spiritual wealth! The man used to love the people of God, and now he says, "They are a vulgar class of persons." So long as he could hear the gospel he did not mind the architecture of the house; but now he has grown æsthetic, and must have a spire, gothic architecture, a marble pulpit, priestly millinery, a conservatory in the church, and all sorts of pretty things. As he has filled his pocket he has emptied his brains, and especially emptied his heart. He has got away from truth and principle in proportion as he has made an advance in his estate. This is a mean business, which at one time he would have been the first to condemn. There is no chivalry in such conduct; it is dastardly to the last degree. God save us from it; but a great many people are not saved from it. Their religion is not a matter of principle, but a matter of interest: it is not the pursuit of truth, but a hankering after society, whatever that may mean; it is not their object to glorify God, but to get rich husbands for their girls: it is not conscience that guides them, but the hope of being able to invite Sir John to dinner with them, and of dining at the hall in return. Do not think I am sarcastic: I speak in sober sadness of things which make one feel ashamed. I hear of them daily, though they do not personally affect me, or this church. This is an age of meannesses disguised under the notion of respectability. God send us men of the stuff of John Knox, or, if you prefer it, of the adamantine metal of Elijah; and if these should prove too stiff and stern we could even be content with such men as Obadiah. Possibly these last might be harder to produce than Elijahs: with God all things are possible.

III. Obadiah with his early grace and persevering decision became a man of EMINENT PIETY, and this is the more remarkable considering what he was and where he was. Eminent piety in a Lord High Chamberlain of Ahab's court! This is a wonder of grace indeed. This man's religion was intense within him. If he did not make the open use of it that Elias did, he was not called to such a career; but it dwelt deep within his soul and others knew it. Jezebel knew it, I have no doubt whatever. She did not like him, but she had to endure him; she looked askance at him, but she could not dislodge him. Ahab had learned to trust him and could not do without him, for he probably furnished him with a little strength of mind. Possibly Ahab liked to retain him just to show Jezebel that he could be obstinate if he liked and was still a man. I have noticed that the most yielding husbands like to indulge in some notion that they are not quite governed by their spouses, and it is possible that on this account Ahab retained Obadiah in his position. At any rate, there he was, and he never yielded to Ahab's sin, nor countenanced his idolatry. Account for it how you may, it is a singular circumstance that in the centre of rebellion against God there was one whose devotion to God was intense and distinguished. As it is horrible to find a Judas among the apostles, so it is grand to discover an Obadiah among Ahab's courtiers. What grace must have been at work to maintain

such a fire in the midst of the sea, such godliness in the midst of the vilest iniquity!

And his eminent piety was very *practical;* for when Jezebel was slaying the prophets he hid them away from her—one hundred of them. I do not know how many servants of the Lord any of you support, but I have not the privilege of knowing any gentleman who sustains a hundred ministers; this man's hospitality was on a grand scale. He fed them with the best he could find for them, and risked his life for them by hiding them away in caves from the search of the queen. He not only used his purse but staked his life when a price was set upon these men's heads. How many among us would place our lives in jeopardy for one of the Lord's servants? At any rate, Obadiah's fear of the Lord brought forth precious fruit, and proved itself to be a powerful principle of action.

His godliness was such, too, that it was recognised by the believers of the day. I feel sure of that, because Obadiah said to Elijah, "Was it not told my lord how I hid the Lord's prophets?" Now, Elijah was the well-known head and leader of the followers of Jehovah throughout that whole nation, and Obadiah was a little astonished that somebody had not told the great prophet about his deed; so that though his generous act may have been concealed from Jezebel and the Baalites, it was well known among the servants of the living God. He was well reported of among those whose good report is worth having; it was whispered about among them that they had a friend at court, that the chamberlain of the palace was on their side. If anybody could rescue a prophet he could, and therefore the prophets of God felt secure in giving themselves up to his care; they knew that he would not betray them to bloodthirsty Jezebel. Their coming to him and confiding in him shows that his faithfulness was well known and highly esteemed. Thus he was strong enough in grace to be a leader recognized by the godly party.

He himself evidently knew Elijah, and did not disdain at once to pay him the utmost reverence. The prophet of God, who was at that moment hated of all men because of the judgment which had been inflicted by his means, and was the special object of the king's pursuit, was honoured by this gracious man.. Early piety is likely to become eminent piety; the man who is likely to fear God greatly is the man who serves God early. You know the old proverb, "He that would thrive must rise at five." It is as applicable to religion as to anything else. He that would thrive with God must be with God early in his days. He who would make great progress in the heavenward race must not lose a moment. Let me urge young people to think of this, and give their hearts to God even now.

Sunday-school teachers, you may be training to-day the men who will keep the truth alive in this land in years to come, the men who will take care of God's servants and be their best allies, the men and women who will win souls to Christ. Go you on with your holy work. You do not know whom you have about you. You might well imitate the tutor who took his hat off to the boys in his school because he did not know what they would turn out to be. Think very highly of your class: you cannot tell who may be there; but assuredly you may have among them those who shall be pillars in the house of God in years to come.

IV. Obadiah's early religion became COMFORTABLE PIETY to him afterwards. When he thought Elijah was about to expose him to great danger he pleaded his long service of God, saying, "I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth"; just as David, when he grew old, said, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works; now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not." It will be a great comfort to you, young people, when you grow old to look back upon a life spent in the service of God. You will not trust in it, you will not think that there is any merit in it; but you will bless God for it. A servant who has been with his master from his youth ought not to be turned adrift when he grows grey. A right-minded master respects the person who has served him long and well. Suppose you had living in the family an old nurse who had nursed you when you were a child, and had lived to bring up your children, would you turn her into the street when she was past her work? No; you will do your best for her; if it is in your power you will keep her out of the workhouse. Now, the Lord is much more kind and gracious than we are, and he will never turn off his old servants. I sometimes cry—

"Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,
But train me for thy will;
For even I, in fields so broad,
Some duties may fulfil;
And I will ask for no reward,
Except to serve thee still."

I anticipate the time when I shall not be able to do all I do now. You and I may look forward a little to the nearing period when we shall pass from middle life to declining years, and we may be assured that our Lord will take care of us to the last. Let us do our diligence to serve him while we have health and strength, and we may be sure that he is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labour of love. It is not the way of him. "Having loved his own which were in the world he loved them to the end." That was said of his Son, and it may be said of the Father also. Oh, believe me, there is no better crutch on which an old man can lean than the fact of God's love to him when he was young. You cannot have a better outlook to your window when your eyes begin to fail than to remember how you went after the Lord in the days of your youth, and devoted your vigour to his service.

Dear young people, if any of you are living in sin I do pray you to recollect that if you are seeking the pleasures of this world to-day you will have to pay for it by-and-by. Rejoice in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee therein; but for all this the Lord will bring thee into judgment. If thy childhood be vanity, and thy youth be wickedness, thy after-days will be sorrow. Oh, that thou wouldest be wise and offer to Christ thy flower in its bud with all its beauty upon it. Thou canst not be too soon holy, for thou canst not be too soon happy. A truly merry life must begin in the great Father's house.

And you, teachers, go on teaching the young the ways of God. In these days the State is giving them secular instruction all the day long, six days in the week; and religious teaching is greatly needed to balance it, or we shall soon become a nation of infidels. Secular teaching is all

very well and good; we never stand in the way of any sort of light: but teaching that has not religion blended with it will simply help men to be bigger rascals than they would be without it. A rogue with a jemmy is bad enough, but a rogue with a pen and a set of cooked accounts robs a hundred for the other's one. Under our present plans children will grow up with greater capacity for mischief, unless the fear of the Lord is set before them, and they are taught in the Scriptures and the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Instead of relaxing Sabbath-school efforts, we shall be wise to increase them greatly.

As to you that have grown old in sin, I cannot talk to you about early piety; but there is a passage of Scripture which ought to give you great hope. Remember how the householder went out at the third, the sixth, the ninth, and at last at the eleventh hour, and found some still standing in the market-place idle. It was late, was it not? Very late. But, blessed be God, it was not too late. They had but one hour left, but the master said, "Go, work in my vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give thee." Now you eleventh-hour people, you people of sixty, sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five, eighty—I would go on to one hundred if I thought you were here of that age—you still may come and enlist in the service of the gracious Lord, who will give you your penny at the close of the day even as he will give to the rest of the labourers. The Lord bring you to his feet by faith in Christ. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Kings, xviii. 1—16; Psalm lxxi.

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STRENGTH AND RECOVERY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 18TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And I will strengthen them in the Lord: and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord."—Zechariah x. 12.

THIS text is pitched in the royal key. It has nothing of the caution and doubting of man about it. Where the word of a king is there is power, and this is the word of a King indeed. It is the word of Jehovah, King of kings and Lord of lords; and you may know it by his sovereign style—"I will," and "they shall." Look at it. You sometimes say, "*I will*," but you mistake your power, and your talk ferments into boasting. Never make your mouth longer than your arm, for that is monstrous. You have said "I will," but you cannot achieve your purpose, for you forgot to say, "If the Lord will"; and that forgotten factor masters you. And when you say, "*They shall*"—ah, then you are out of your reckoning; for who are they that you can command? You cannot say it without question concerning your own children, nor your own wife, nor your own friend. The wills of men and women are wayward, and fickle, and if you calculate upon them you may soon find yourself at fault. Hesitate before you say "*They shall*" in reference to any of our liberty-loving race. Sometimes the word is no sooner spoken than you discover that you have provoked a "shall not." Men are not to be ruled and governed just after that fashion: they are not like your boy's chessmen, which he can move at his pleasure, and take in and out of the box whenever he likes.

Will and *shall* are not for us feeble beings. But the Lord has a right to the imperial style, and it is in order for him to say "I will" and "they shall," since he has the power to make good his words. This majestic speech is no novelty with him. You will find it all through his covenant utterances. He speaks in the tone of omnipotence. He speaks like one who knows his own mind, and understands how to rule the minds of others. "Oh," says one, "but men are free agents." I never thought that they were not, although I am not sure that it is much to their gain that they are. The glorious privilege of the freedom of the will has been terribly overrated: it is a dangerous heritage which has already lost us Paradise, and will lose us all hope of heaven unless the mighty

grace of God shall interpose. But, let it stand as it may, God is able to say of free will and of free agents, "I will," and "they shall." His government is such that without violating the nature of the creature that he has made, or putting upon it any physical constraint contrary to its own condition, he can accomplish his own purposes in all respects.

Grace knows how to work gently, quietly, yet potently, so that the most unwilling feel themselves sweetly constrained to be willing; and those that were most desperately opposed feel their hearts relenting and their spirits yielding to the divine purpose. The grace of God secretly melts down the ice, breaks to pieces the rock, and dissolves the adamant. The man's obstinacy is broken, his rebellious spirit is melted, and yet the man remains entire, and cries with all his heart, "I will," though a little before he had been stubborn and resolute. The "shall" of grace is mightier than the "I will" of pride. The will of the Lord leads the will of man in silken bonds, more strong than fetters of iron.

Do not be afraid of the sovereignty and omnipotence of divine grace; but, on the contrary, look to it as the last resource of a broken-down spirit. When there remaineth no strength in you, nor any ability of any kind or sort, then fling yourself upon the divine strength, and lay hold upon it, and rejoice that if God has said, "they shall," then assuredly you will. I call your attention to this sovereign style on purpose, for there be many that exalt man in these days. He has become the god of modern idolatry. But as for us, we have yet to speak on the behalf of God, and to lift up his name higher and higher, only wishing we had greater power with which to tell out the glory of the Ever Blessed who is Lord of all, who doeth as he wills in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.

With that as a preface, let me call your attention to the very delightful promise of this text. It relates to the Jews, no doubt, and in them will have a form of fulfilment. In the first utterance of it, it relates to that nation; but every covenant promise that belongs to the seed of Abraham belongs to every believer, for believers are the truest seed of Abraham. These are the true Israel that worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh. In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, circumcision nor uncircumcision. The inheritance is not according to the flesh, but it is according to the spirit, according to the promise, according to the grace of God and the power of God. Without the slightest hesitation each believer here may appropriate to himself this text as far as it suits his condition and necessity. "I will strengthen them in the Lord: and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord." Observe the "saith the Lord," like a great seal, confirming the charter. A "thus saith the Lord" makes assurance doubly sure. You have here a word from the mouth of the Almighty. Be not afraid to feast upon the text, for by every word of God shall man live.

I. The first thing I see here is A SINGULAR FORM OF STRENGTH. "I will strengthen them *in the Lord*."

There are many forms of force and power, and men possess more or less of various kinds of strength; but this is a singular and special kind of energy. "I will strengthen them *in the Lord*." *Physical* strength is very desirable. What a blessing it is to be hale and strong, and healthy and vigorous! But a man may have gigantic force, and it may

be a curse to him. He may use his bodily strength for the very worst of purposes: the brute within him may be the more brutish because it is so vigorous. The strongest man that ever lived was one of the most unhappy of men, through the temptation to which his vigorous flesh exposed him. Samson was the weakest as well as the strongest of men. Let no man glory in his bodily strength, for he is excelled in it by the horse, the ox, and the ass. Man has but to take iron and he can build for himself an engine which shall be stronger than thousands of men. There is nothing very noble in mere animal strength, though some glory in it, as though it made heroes of them.

> "How vain is man who boasts in fight
> The valour of gigantic might."

There is a higher strength which we call *mental* power—the energy of mind—certainly a very desirable talent. Yet men of great minds have descended to follies unworthy of the weakest. Remember Lord Bacon—"the greatest, meanest of mankind." In several instances wide knowledge has been accompanied with the pettiest possible designs; and men who have seemed to equal angels in their intellect have verged upon devils in their motives. It is a sad thing that it should be so; but mental force without moral principle has become an engine of destruction, an instrument of mischief. Of all kinds of villains the educated villain is the most to be dreaded. The thief who knows nothing is readily captured; but he that is adroit and well instructed baffles police, and plunders without making himself the victim of the law. It is not an unmixed blessing to possess unusual mental force. It involves great responsibility, and may therefore increase the guilt of its owner.

There is what I may call *official* strength, too—that strength which a man collects and vests in himself by reason of the position which he occupies, and this is not the highest order of power. The man is at the head of a body of men, and they become his forces. A leader finds strength in his following. By his influence he sways them; his word is law to them; he speaks, and they obey his utterances. They are ready to do everything or nothing, as he may choose. It is a great power; but oh, how frequently has it been misused for the purposes of the demagogue or of the tyrant! It is not, after all, a very desirable thing, for he that has it might almost wish to be without it, since it entails so much of toil, anxiety, and care, and is so difficult to use aright. Well used it works to noblest results, but in the hands of one who is spiritually weak it is as dangerous as fire-arms in the grasp of children.

But the text speaks of a far higher form of strength than either of these. God says of his people, "I will strengthen them *in the Lord*." Oh that we might experience this process to the utmost degree! We can never have too much of strength in the Lord. It is a thing so pure, so heavenly, so divine, that if we were strengthened till we became spiritual Samsons, if our minds were enlarged till we became spiritual Solomons, and if our influence over others were increased till we became commanders like David, strength from the Lord would fit us to wield the utmost measure of these lower forces. To be strengthened with strength in the Lord is of all things the most desirable.

But what is it? What is this kind of strength in the Lord? Does it not mean *a strength that comes distinctly and directly from God himself*, and gives us a measure of the power with which God himself is strong in spirit, so far as it is communicable to his creatures? God is strong in his will to accomplish good, strong in resolve, strong in love, strong in right; nothing can overcome him, or turn him aside from his purpose. He is strong morally, because he is infinitely holy, unquestionably just, immutably good. Righteousness and integrity are the bulwarks of his kingdom. I speak of him now, not as the eternal God alone in himself, but as he is pleased to reveal himself to us: in dispensations of law and gospel the supreme power of the Lord over the moral nature of man lies in his spotless perfection of character.

I notice that whenever the Lord strengthens a man with divine strength, it makes him *strong in faith*. He believes the promise, believes it intensely, makes a matter-of-fact of it, and acts upon it. He does not stagger at the promise through unbelief, but he gives glory to God; and therefore he does and he dares what other men cannot do, what other men would not dare to do. Strengthened with an inward might, he learns to look at the word of God as sure; he takes it to be his daily food, and rejoices in it more than they that find great spoil.

In some men this strength from God takes the form of *great patience*. They have been severely tried, but they are not overcome. They have been cast down, but they have not been destroyed: they have been distressed, but they are not in despair. What a strong man was Job! I do not know where to point to a greater instance of the strength of God in man. He was stronger than enemies, fire, wind, and death. He was covered with sore boils, but his heart was not conquered. If any of you have felt even one of such horrible gatherings, you can guess what a torture it must be to have these boils upon one's skin from head to foot, and to scrape one's self with a potsherd. To have lost everything was comparatively a trifle; but to sit there in his sorrow and to be tortured, punctured as with a thousand bodkins, by his cruel friends, who so bitterly accused him of being a hypocrite, and yet to bless the Lord was no easy matter. Those critics who are of the same nature as Ham love to dilate upon Job's faults; for my part, I would go backward and cover them. The weakness of the man was seen; but still the divine power was gloriously conspicuous when the patriarch cried, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." This is a kind of power which only God can give, and he that gets it is a spiritual giant in the esteem of those holy beings who know how to estimate the highest forces in the truest fashion.

The man who becomes strengthened by God himself becomes strong in *prayer*. You should see the man of God upon his knees. The posts of the doors of heaven move while he pleads with Jehovah. He is one that can cast his arms about the loins of the covenant angel, and give him a throw; he will continue untiringly to contend with him, crying,

> "With thee all night I mean to stay,
> And wrestle till the break of day."

When a man is thus strengthened he overcomes heaven by prayer.

He carries the holy city by storm; he comes boldly to the throne of the Most High; on Jehovah's arm he lays his hand, and to him he cries, "Even thou, great God, shall hear the voice of my cry. Fulfil thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. Do as thou hast said."

A man that is strengthened with such might as this *can face his fellow-men* as bravely as Elijah met vacillating Israel upon Carmel. He exercises influence among his fellow-men, for he moves among them as a being made superior to themselves. We sometimes read in history of the great bravery of the knights, and of their deeds of prowess, and so forth. I confess I think rather little of their so-called chivalry, considering their superior accoutrements. When a man is boxed up in iron from head to foot, and his horse too, and is able to rush with his lance among hundreds of poor fellows wearing nothing but their common clothes, they may look at him as a great hero, but I do not see the amazing courage which he displays: I have more respect for the coat of mail than for the male who is coated in it. Far more brave is it for the poor man whose name is never mentioned—the common soldier in the regiment—to dash into the fight. Far more honourable is it to wage spiritual war, not with flesh and blood but with spiritual wickednesses; and to wage it not with iron and sulphur, but with love and truth. The child of God, without any derogation from his honour, is, when he is strengthened by God, like the knight in the midst of common soldiers. He is clad from head to foot in the armour of light, and he wields the falchion of the Spirit, which is swift and sharp: when he speaks God speaks through him, and when he pleads with men God gives him the power that touches consciences and hearts, and conquers them with holy arguments. The man made strong by God for himself becomes a mighty power among his fellow-men.

It is a thing greatly to be desired that you and I should be strengthened by God's strength, for then we are *prepared to do the Lord's work effectually*. Do you not see the difference between quiet strength and fussy weakness? Do you not know brethren who appear to do a lot of work, but nothing ever comes of it? and sisters, too, that go fussing about, and accomplish nothing with great pains? You have seen another person who has said comparatively little, but his deeds have been eloquent. He wields the hammer of Thor, he gives one blow and thereby drives the nail right through, and with another he clenches it; work is done by him in a moment which another talked of for twenty years. This is the real distinction among the servants of God—having power or not having power; and God here tells his people that, if they desire it and will have it, he will strengthen them in the Lord.

This kind of strength—very wonderful as it is to me, and as I think it must be to you—is *exceedingly useful* in all manner of ways. It is useful for our daily *walk*, work, and warfare. A man that is strong in the Lord is quiet and calm; he is not afraid of evil tidings, for "his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord"—and in this quietude lies his deliverance from fret and faint. He is not amazed when he is troubled on every side, for he knows that he will have to bear his share of affliction, and he accepts the will of God. He has bowed his heart by the grace of God to bear all that the Lord decrees. He feels that God is with him, that his

strength will be equal to his day, that the all-sufficient God will supply all his need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus; and so he travels on serenely through this vale of tears. Half our fretting and quarrelling comes of our weakness. When a man is well he is not half so likely to be discontented with himself or to fall out with everybody else as he is when he is sickening or weak. God give you strength, dear friends, for your daily walk at home and abroad, for this will be to the comfort of those around you.

And then, besides our walk, we have our *work;* and we want strength for that. Whatsoever the Lord has called you to do, the power with which to do it must come from himself. "He rendereth to every man according to his work," giving double power for double labour. You will not find the power in your natural abilities; neither can you attain it by imitating some successful man; but God himself will grant you strength for every service to which he calls you.

Then, besides our walk and our work, there is a *warfare* going on. Alas! we have to fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil—foes without and foes within; but we shall be more than a match for all adversaries if we do but realize this text: "I will strengthen them in the Lord." For all the battles which shall disturb us between here and heaven our strength is found in God himself, and we may sweetly sing, "Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

Ere I leave this point, I desire you to notice that *there is no limit set* in the text. "I will strengthen them in the Lord" is a general statement without a boundary. It does not say how far God will strengthen any one of us, and I would therefore encourage you to try how far you can be strengthened. When God sets a limit, do not go beyond it; but when there is none take brave leave to go as far as ever you can. You do not know, my dear young sister, how strong God can make you yet: go and ask for great grace, that you may be much more useful than you now are. Neither do you know, my young brother, just commencing life, how much the Lord may enable you to do: go to him with a large measure in your hand, and ask him to fill it, and make you fruitful in every good word and work. Some of us have been for years engaged in the Master's work, but I suppose we might have been tenfold more strong if we had possessed more faith, more love, more zeal, more, in fact, of heavenly energy. For one, I should not like to go back over again to try if I could do better. I am perfectly satisfied to have come so far on the journey, and grateful for help given; but yet I am persuaded that I might have done better and accomplished more if I had sought more of the Holy Ghost and his power from on high. The weakest among us may yet be as David, and David may be as the angel of the Lord. There is a boundless field before the saints; God has opened the door and none can shut it. O for grace to enter in and possess the land! I would encourage a craving ambition with regard to spiritual strength. We cannot be too strong in the Lord. Get thee up, O babe, up thy Father's knee, and ask him to make thee a young man; and rise, O young man, and pray the Lord to make thee a father in the midst of Israel, and a blessing to many; for we have not many fathers in the church of God. Aspire to live to the utmost of life's

possibilities; and be this the resolve of every brother and sister here—that, by God's grace, you will drink in as much of love, of life, of light, and of power from God as you can hold, and that you will endeavour to reflect as much of God's light and glory among the sons of men as he is pleased to bestow upon you. "I will strengthen them in the Lord." So much for that first point.

II. Now I want to come, in the second place, to a matter with which I have very great personal sympathy just now. "I will strengthen them in the Lord":—I call your attention here to A VERY REMARKABLE OPERATION. Strength is given, of that we have spoken; but here is the giving of the strength, God himself declaring that he will bestow it. The Lord himself says "*I* will strengthen them." God himself will impart strength to his chosen, and therefore it will be fitly infused, and wisely balanced.

I would say of this operation, that *it is painfully needed.* You know how it is with our bodies: if we long suffer from illness, when the pain is gone there is a dreadful weakness left, and we require time to regain strength. Restoration is a long process: the weakened limbs only recover strength by slow degrees. The man that long has tossed upon the weary bed of pain does not at once run and leap as he did before the chill hand of disease was laid upon him. You may crush in a moment, but you cannot so speedily cure. Our soul, like our body, is sometimes grievously diseased, and we fall into sin and backsliding, doubt and fear, lukewarmness and grief, and thus we are brought to death's door. Then it is that we need this text, "I will strengthen them in the Lord." Brother, your sin is forgiven by the grace of God, your great grief is taken from you by the kind application of the blood of Christ by the Holy Spirit; but you are dreadfully feeble, and can hardly crawl to the mercy-seat. For you in this weakness this divine word is intended. Graciously it is adapted to you in your present low condition, "I will strengthen them in the Lord." You are very much emaciated, the Lord will feed you with heavenly food. You are out of order spiritually, the Lord will be your Physician. Have you been careless? Have you gone away from your God? Have you fallen into sin? Are you chill at heart? Do you long to be set right? Did you come into this place just now saying, "I wish I might get a blessing, for I feel so out of sorts that I hardly know whether I am a child of God or not"? Your heavenly surgeon is waiting to heal you. God, himself, comes to you and says, "I will strengthen them in the Lord." He can help your infirmities till he has helped you quite out of them. Is it not written "then shall the lame man leap as an hart"? Are not men of faith "out of weakness made strong" so that they put to flight the armies of the alien? Jehovah Rophi can commence to-night that blessed process by which every trembling member of your spiritual frame shall be braced up, and you shall arise and put on strength.

"Oh, but," you say to yourself, "if I do not grow better than I now am spiritually, I know that I shall get worse; for there is no standing still." This is quite true, and I would warn some here who are living far away from God that they must return from their backslidings, or else there will be bad times ahead for them. You who pray so little had need at once to watch and pray. You are children of God, but you do not

read your Bibles diligently, and you hardly know what communion with Christ means. You are also idle, and indifferent in reference to holy endeavours, and somewhat loose in your manners, and lax in your company. Am I not coming home to some of you? I wish to be personal and faithful. Are you not spiritually sick at this time? I refer to certain who are here present. You are weak, and you will probably grow weaker and weaker till you will be as the bruised reed and as the smoking flax, useless and even obnoxious. Do you wish it to be so? Do you not dread falling by little and little? What is wanted is that, at this very time, you should come to a turning point, quit your decays, and begin to strengthen the things which remain which are ready to die. Oh, what some of us ought to have been by now! For my own part, I blush and will say no more. Confusion of face covers me that I should have so many advantages and yet grow so slowly. But oh, brothers and sisters, may not shame come to some of you? You have been children of God for thirty or forty years, and are no more than babes even now. You are poor examples to others notwithstanding all that God has done for you, done in you, and done by you. After all the manifestations of his love to you, and the tenderness of his dealings with you, your poor unworthy return cannot be mentioned without tears. Come, we must turn over a new leaf, or, rather, we must get a taste of the leaves of the tree which are for the healing of the nations, that we may revive out of decline.

This strength is *faithfully promised*, and the promise will be assuredly performed. "I will strengthen them in the Lord." God never said "I will" without intending it: his promises are his purposes. Christ has set a "Yea and Amen" on every promise of the Father, and each one is sure as the truth of Jehovah. Lay you hold on the promise. It is as sure as God lives. He is able to strengthen you; he is willing to strengthen you; and he will effectually do it in answer to prayer.

This strength shall be *divinely bestowed* upon you: it shall come directly from the Holy Spirit. He that made you live at the first shall make you live more vigorously; for Christ came not only that we might have life, but that we might have it "more abundantly." If you want more life, go where you received your first life—to him of whom we spoke the other Sabbath day, who says, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."*

Perhaps that strength will be *gradually received*. I am an example to-night in my physical frame of what you will experience in your spiritual frame, for I find that I do not recover strength very rapidly. Yet it is so sweet every morning for the hands to do a little that they could not do yesterday, and for the feet to be able to walk a yard or two farther than a few days ago. A little progress is a great boon to one who has long lain on his bed. Some of you may never have felt gratitude to God of the kind that has come to me; I have been thankful for the power to lift my foot from the ground, thankful for being able to turn over in bed, thankful for being able to stand upright, though leaning heavily upon my staff. The Lord is frequently pleased

* See No. 1799. "Though he were dead."

to strengthen his people little by little that they may prize the blessing and be all the more careful to retain it. Yet the Lord can make the weak ones strong in a moment, and raise them at once from bed to battle, from lukewarmness to ardour. Yet wonder not if recovery should be slow, but as you grow a little stronger, and a little stronger, acknowledge in each increase of strength that the Lord has a new claim on your affection.

Now, one of the signs of his strengthening his people is, as it is with the body, that they display a growing appetite—men who are mending find themselves hungry between meals. "Oh," the doctor says, "that is a capital sign. You will get on now." I love to see God's people when the Lord is strengthening them, for then they leave off being dainty and fault-finding, and prove the truth of Solomon's proverb, that to the hungry man every bitter thing is sweet. Then they come to Monday night prayer-meetings and week evening services. They used to be able to do very well from Sunday to Sunday, and I have known some of them get on with one meal on the Lord's day, and like it all the better if that was quickly served and soon over. When the gracious Lord strengthens his people they become very sharp-set. Somebody said on Sunday morning to me, "Did you not feel it sweet preaching?" I replied, "I always feel it sweet preaching the gospel of the grace of God." "Ah, but," he said, "the people swallowed it all just as it came from your mouth, and they seemed so hungry after it." Truly this makes a preacher happy. Feasts go well when the guests are famishing: at the table of mercy we prefer eaters to grumblers. Anybody can preach when everybody is drinking it in with his eyes and his ears, and all his heart. I have not to ask for people's attention, because they give it of their own accord; and then the good there may be in the sermon is appreciated, for hungry souls do not let a crumb fall to the ground. When people are being strengthened of God, they are not content with one meal on the Sabbath, they want another, and perhaps a prayer-meeting or a Sunday-school for a dessert. They are not content with just two or three minutes' prayer in the morning, they like if they can to slip out of business and get a word with God in the middle of the day. They delight to carry a text of Scripture in their memories to sweeten their breath all the day, and they cannot be happy unless they meditate upon the word. I think you make a great mistake when you go galloping through the whole Bible, reading half-a-dozen chapters every day; you do much better when you get a text and ruminate upon it, just as the cows chew the cud. Turn the Scripture over, and over, and get all the juice, sweetness, and nourishment out of it and you will do well. The spiritually hungry man says, "I must go and hear some servant of God, and hear what God, the Lord, will speak to me. I must get as much of the heavenly food as I possibly can, for I need it so greatly." So the Lord strengthens us by his own ordinances, putting honour upon the means of grace, and giving to his servants the high privilege of feeding those who have become hungry through restoring grace.

It is *a very delightful thing* when the divine Lord begins to strengthen his people. I pray for some of you that he may do it in your cases. You have been very wretched and miserable, have you not? When

you are strengthened from on high you begin to feel a greater joy, and oh, a little joy is so sweet to a soul that has been much cast down: you have not obtained assurance yet, but you have a growing faith which is precious. Now and then a glint of sunlight comes into your soul, and this is much to one who has long sat in darkness. You have begun talking to somebody about Christ; ay, and you are interested in another prisoner of hope who is in the same state that you have so lately escaped from. I like that. Now the chapter that you did not dare to read, because it seemed to threaten you so much, you now read without alarm: the black cloud breaks with silver showers of blessing upon you. Now you venture to ask for blessings in prayer that you never dared to seek before, and you receive them and are made exceeding glad. All heaven opens to your knock, and your desire to pray is greatly increased. The Lord will glorify himself by you yet by his great grace, for he is already making the weakling strong. He will continue to invigorate you till you shall mount up with wings as eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint. Think of such a poor mouse as you, that was never happy till you got down into your hole, being able to mount up on wings into the heavenly places, once so far above your hopes. You will do it: you will do it, and you will be perfectly safe up yonder in those elevations which once seemed to be dizzy heights. God will give you such broad wings, and such bright eyes, that you will face the sun and exult in his burning glories. Do not be afraid, but be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. The strength of your faith shall breed a strength of expectation; that expectation shall lead you to grasp that which God is prepared to give, and you shall thus rise height upon height, nearer and nearer to your God, strengthened in the name of the Lord.

III. But time fails, and I must therefore finish with my third point. We have spoken of a singular strength, and a remarkable operation; and now we will speak of A SATISFACTORY RESULT. "And they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the Lord."

"Walk up and down." It means *activity*. They shall be on the move, and no longer hug the sluggard's pillow. They shall get to work; they shall do business in the streets of the New Jerusalem. They shall be making progress; they shall be traversing fields of truth, and gathering choice spices, and fruits. Instead of lying prone they shall walk up and down.

The phrase implies *ease* and security. People do not walk up and down when they are afraid of their lives, or when they are under pressure to keep an engagement, and are in hot haste to be in time. Not: "they shall walk up and down" in secure but active pleasure. The Lord gives to his people, when he makes them strong, a happy, joyful activity. It shall be a joy to them to do what the Lord bids them to

do; for he is no taskmaster: he does not set us to make bricks without straw. He does not drive us like slaves, but he blesses us as sons. He represents himself as treating his people as a good husbandman would do who drove his ploughing oxen to the end of the field, and turned them round, and then drove them to the end again; but when they had wrought for the due time he did not overwork them, but allowed them to stand still, while he laid meat unto them, and took the yoke from their shoulders and the bit from between their jaws. I like to see the horses with their nosebags, resting and feeding: and the Lord gives his people a nosebag every now and then, and they stand and enjoy themselves by feeding upon heavenly food. These are the people that do the work. Not your law-driven people, who are told to work for life and toil for their own salvation. They do just nothing at all; but those that are saved, and made strong in the sense of their salvation, and mighty through contact with the almighty God—these are they that go up the field and down the field, working on and on to good purpose. These are to be found steadfast and unwearied, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because they have experienced that in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength.

There is a delicious *freedom* about this walking up and down in the name of the Lord. They do not fly from notice like timid fawns: "he that believeth shall not make haste." They do not come out of their dens and then hurry back again like hunted foxes; but they walk in comfort, as citizens upon the bulwarks of a city, taking their airings in the morning and in the evening, defying the foe, if foe there be. They are not afraid, neither are they under constraint. It is a blessed thing when God makes you so strong that you walk at liberty. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." There is no freedom like that which the free Spirit works in the free children of the ever-blessed God.

There seems to me to be the idea of *perseverance* about all this. This walking up and down in the name of the Lord means keeping on at it, going on from day to day, and week to week, and year to year. I see a brother sitting in this house to-night who used to come to me at one time with a huge iron collar round his neck, and he also wore manacles upon his hands and fetters upon his feet, so that he was a miserable object. I tried to cheer and comfort him, but it was to little purpose; he was a prisoner in the innermost dungeon and his heart failed him, for he feared he should die in the prison-house. Here he sits to-night, and I believe that he is as happy as anybody living, for the Lord has set him at liberty and put new strength into him. I trust that he is so truly restored that for many and many a year he will walk up and down in the name of the Lord as happy as all the birds

of the early summertide. The Lord has made him strong, and I pray that he may continue so, and be a helper to others. We do get down sometimes, but when the Lord comes and makes us strong, we soon get up again, and peace succeeds to war. We are not always in a storm; occasionally we enjoy a long stretch of smooth sailing. A wet sheet and a fair wind, and away goes the vessel, making headway as she never did before. It is not good to be altogether without trials. How sweet is your food after your mouth has been rinsed out with quinine! When you know the wormwood and the gall, then the joy of the Lord is as heaven below. Up and down walking brings a wide experience which is better than monotony.

I would encourage every child of God to aspire to the strength that God is able to give him. Let him place himself under the operations of the Spirit of God, and when he has felt the inward invigoration let him walk up and down in the name of the Lord, taking healthy exercise in divine things.

Some of you cannot do that. You first need to be made alive unto God. The dead cannot gather strength or walk up and down. I do not ask *you* to pray for strength, but to cry for life. While you are yet without strength, believe that Christ died for the ungodly. With all your weakness and your death, trust in him who said, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." When you have found Christ, you shall learn what a godlike life is to be found in him. May the omnipotent God impart his own boundless power to you according as you have need, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xxiii.

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A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 26TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."—1 Thessalonians i. 9, 10.

IN Thessalonica the conversions to the faith were remarkable. Paul came there without prestige, without friends, when he was in the very lowest condition; for he had just been beaten and imprisoned at Philippi, and had fled from that city. Yet it mattered not in what condition the ambassador might be; God, who worketh mighty things by weak instruments, blessed the word of his servant Paul. No doubt when the apostle went into the synagogue to address his own countrymen he had great hopes that, by reasoning with them out of their own Scriptures, he might convince them that Jesus was the Christ. He soon found that only a few would search the Scriptures and form a judgment on the point; but the bulk of them refused, for we read of the Jews of Berea, to whom Paul fled from Thessalonica, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Paul must have felt disappointed with his own countrymen; indeed, he had often cause to do so. His heart was affectionately warm toward them, but their hearts were very bitter towards him, reckoning him to be a pervert and an apostate. But if he seemed to fail with the Jews, it is evident that he was abundantly successful with the Gentiles. These turned from their idols to serve the living God, and their turning was so remarkable that the Jews charged Paul and Silas with turning the world upside down.

In those days there was a good deal of practical atheism abroad, and therefore the wonder was not so much that men left their idols, as that they turned unto the living God. It became a matter of talk all over the city, and the Jews in their violence helped to make the matter more notorious; for the mobs in the street and the attack upon the house

of Jason all stirred the thousand tongues of rumour. Everybody spoke of the sudden appearance of three poor Jews, of their remarkable teaching in the synagogue, and of the conversion of a great multitude of devout Greeks, and of the chief women not a few. It was no small thing that so many had come straight away from the worship of Jupiter and Mercury to worship the unknown God, who could not be seen, nor imaged; and to enter the kingdom of one Jesus who had been crucified. It set all Macedonia and Achaia wondering; and as with a trumpet-blast it aroused all the dwellers in those regions. Every ship that sailed from Thessalonica carried the news of the strange ferment which was moving the city; men were caring for religion, and were quitting old beliefs for a new and better faith. Thessalonica, situated on one of the great Roman roads, the centre of a large trade, thus became a centre for the gospel. Wherever there are true conversions there will be more or less of this kind of sounding forth of the gospel. It was especially so at Thessalonica; but it is truly so in every church where the Spirit of God is uplifting men from the dregs of evil, delivering them from drunkenness, and dishonesty, and uncleanness, and worldliness, and making them to become holy and earnest in the cause of the great Lord. There is sure to be a talk when grace triumphs. This talk is a great aid to the gospel: it is no small thing that men should have their attention attracted to it by its effects; for it is both natural and just that thoughtful men should judge of doctrines by their results; and if the most beneficial results follow from the preaching of the word, prejudice is disarmed, and the most violent objectors are silenced.

You will notice that in this general talk the converts and the preachers were greatly mixed up:—"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you." I do not know that it is possible for the preacher to keep himself distinct from those who profess to be converted by him. He is gladly one with them in love to their souls, but he would have it remembered that he cannot be responsible for all their actions. Those who profess to have been converted under any ministry have it in their power to damage that ministry far more than any adversaries can do. "There!" says the world, when it detects a false professor, "this is what comes of such preaching." They judge unfairly, I know; but most men are in a great hurry, and will not examine the logic of their opponents; while many others are so eager to judge unfavourably, that a very little truth, or only a bare report, suffices to condemn both the minister and his doctrine. Every man that lives unto God with purity of life brings honour to the gospel which converted him, to the community to which he belongs, and to the preaching by which he was brought to the knowledge of the truth; but the reverse is equally true in the case of unworthy adherents. Members of churches, will you kindly think of this? Your ministers share the blame of your ill conduct if ever you disgrace yourselves. I feel sure that none of you wish to bring shame and trouble upon your pastors, however careless you may be about your own reputations. Oh, that we could be freed from those of whom Paul says, "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose

glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." When these are in a church they are its curse. The Thessalonians were not such: they were such a people that Paul did not blush to have himself implicated in what they did. He was glad to say that the outsiders "show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven."

Quitting this line of thought, I would observe that these two verses struck me as being singularly full. Oceans of teaching are to be found in them. A father of the church in the first ages was wont to cry, "I adore the infinity of Holy Scripture." That remark constantly rises from my lips when I am studying the sacred Word. This book is more than a book,—it is the mother of books, a mine of truth, a mountain of meaning. It was an ill-advised opinion which is imputed to the Mahommedans at the destruction of the Alexandrian Library, when they argued that everything that was good in it was already in the Koran, and therefore it might well be destroyed. Yet it is true with regard to the inspired Word of God, that it contains everything which appertains to eternal life. It is a revelation of which no man can take the measure, it compasses heaven and earth, time and eternity. The best evidence of its being written by an Infinite mind is its own infinity. Within a few of its words there lie hidden immeasurable meanings, even as perfume enough to sweeten leagues of space may be condensed into a few drops of otto of roses.

The first part of my text contains *a summary of Christian experience;* and the second part contains *a body of divinity.* Here is ample room and verge enough. It is not possible to exhaust such a theme.

I. The first part of the text contains A SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE: "What manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven." Here we have in miniature the biography of a Christian man.

It begins, first, with *the entering in of the word,*—"What manner of entering in we had unto you." When we preach the word you listen, and, so far, the word is received. This is a very hopeful circumstance. Still, the hearing with the outward ear is comparatively a small matter; or, at least, only great because of what may follow from it. The preacher feels even with some who listen with attention that he is outside the door; he is knocking, and he hopes that he is heard within; but the truth is not yet received, the door remains shut, an entrance is not granted, and in no case can he be content to speak with the person outside the door; he desires an entrance for the Word. All is fruitless until Christ entereth into the heart. I have seen the following: the door has been a little opened, and the man inside has come to look at the messenger, and more distinctly to hear what he may have to say; but he has taken care to put the door on the chain, or hold it with his hand, for he is not yet ready to admit the guest who is so desirous of entertainment. The King's messenger has sometimes tried to put his foot within when the door has stood a little open, but he has not always been successful, and has not even escaped from a painful hurt when the door has been forced back with angry violence. We have

called again and again with our message, but we have been as men who besieged a walled city, and were driven from the gates; yet we had our reward, for when the Holy Spirit sweetly moved the hard heart the city gates have opened of their own accord, and we have been received joyfully. We have heard the hearty cry, "Let the truth come in! Let the gospel come in! Let Christ come in! Whatever there is in him we are willing to receive; whatever he demands we are willing to give; whatever he offers us we are glad to accept. Come and welcome! The guest-chamber is prepared. Come and abide in our house for ever!"

The truth has its own ways of entrance; but in general it first affects the understanding. The man says, "I see it: I see how God is just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. I see sin laid on Christ that it may not be laid on me, and I perceive that if I believe in Jesus Christ my sins are put away by his atonement." To many all that is wanted is that they should understand this fundamental truth; for their minds are prepared of God to receive it. Only make it plain and they catch at it as a hungry man at a piece of bread. They discover in the gospel of our Lord Jesus the very thing for which they have been looking for years, and so the truth enters by the door of the understanding.

Then it usually commences to work upon the conscience, conscience being the understanding exercised upon moral truth. The man sees himself a sinner, discovering guilt that he was not aware of; and he is thus made ready to receive Christ's pardoning grace. He sees that to have lived without thinking of God, without loving God, without serving God was a great and grievous crime: he feels the offensiveness of this neglect. He trembles; he consents unto the law that it is good, and he allows that, if the law condemns him, he is worthy to be condemned.

When it has thus entered into the understanding and affected the conscience, the word of God usually arouses the emotions. Fear is awakened, and hope is excited. The man begins to feel as he never felt before. His whole manhood is brought under the heavenly spell; his very flesh doth creep in harmony with the amazement of his soul. He wonders and dreads, weeps and quivers, hopes and doubts; but no emotion is asleep; life is in all. When a tear rises to his eye he brushes it away, but it is soon succeeded by another. Repentance calls forth one after another of these her sentinels. The proud man is broken down; the hard man is softened. The love of God in providing a Saviour, the unsearchable riches of divine grace in passing by transgression, iniquity, and sin,—these things amaze and overwhelm the penitent. He finds himself suddenly dissolved, where aforetime he was hard as adamant; for the word is entering into him, and exercising its softening power.

By-and-by the entrance is complete; for the truth carries the central castle of Mansoul, and captures his heart. He who once hated the gospel now loves it. At first he loves it, hoping that it may be his, though fearing the reverse; yet owning that if it brought no blessing to himself, yet it was a lovable and desirable thing. By-and-by the man ventures to grasp it, encouraged by the word that bids him lay hold on eternal life. One who in digging his land finds a treasure, first looks about, for fear

lest some one else should claim it; anon he dares to examine his prize more carefully, and at length he bears it in his bosom to his own home. So is it with the gospel; when a man finds it by the understanding, he soon embraces it with his heart; and, believe me, if it once gets into the heart, the arch-enemy himself will never get it out again. Oh, that such an entrance with the gospel might commence the spiritual life of all here present who are as yet unsaved.

What comes next? Well, the second stage is *conversion*. "They themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how *ye turned* from idols to serve the living and true God." There came a turning, a decided turning. The man has come so far in carelessness, so far in sin and unbelief; but now he pauses, and he deliberately turns round, and faces in that direction to which hitherto he had turned his back. Conversion is the turning of a man completely round, to hate what he loved and to love what he hated. Conversion is to turn to God decidedly and distinctly by an act and deed of the mind and will. In some senses we are *turned;* but in others, like these Thessalonians, we *turn*. It is not conversion to think that you will turn, or to promise that you will turn, or resolve that you will turn, but actually and in very deed to turn, because the word has had a true entrance into your heart. You must not be content with a reformation; there must be a revolution: old thrones must fall, and a new king must reign. Is it so with you?

These Thessalonians turned from their idols. Do you tell me that you have no idols? Think again, and you will not be quite so sure. The streets of London are full of fetich worship, and almost every dwelling is a joss-house crammed with idols. Why, multitudes of men are worshipping not calves of gold, but gold in a more portable shape. Small circular idols of gold and silver are much sought after. They are very devoutly worshipped by some, and great things are said concerning their power. I have heard the epithet of "almighty" ascribed to an American form of these idols. Those who do not worship gold may yet worship rank, name, pleasure, or honour. Most worship self, and I do not know that there is a more degrading form of worship than for a man to put himself upon a pedestal and bow down thereto and worship it. You might just as well adore cats and crocodiles with the ancient Egyptians as pay your life's homage to yourselves. No wooden image set up by the most savage tribe can be more ugly or degrading than our idol when we adore ourselves. Men worship Bacchus still. Do not tell me they do not: why, there is a temple to him at every street corner. While every other trade is content with a shop or a warehouse, this fiend has his palaces, in which plentiful libations are poured forth in his honour. The gods of unchastity and vice are yet among us. It would be a shame even to speak of the things which are done of them in secret. The lusts of the flesh are served even by many who would not like to have it known. We have gods many and lords many in this land. God grant that we may see, through the preaching of the gospel, many turning from such idols. If you love anything better than God you are idolaters: if there is anything you would not give up for God it is your idol: if there is anything that you seek with greater fervour

than you seek the glory of God, that is your idol, and conversion means a turning from every idol.

But then that is not enough, for some men turn from one idol to another. If they do not worship Bacchus they become teetotalers, and possibly they worship the golden calf, and become covetous. When men quit covetousness they sometimes turn to profligacy. A change of false gods is not the change that will save: we must turn unto God, to trust, love, and honour him, and him alone.

After conversion comes *service*. True conversion causes us "to serve the living and true God." To serve him means to worship him, to obey him, to consecrate one's entire being to his honour and glory, and to be his devoted servant.

We are, dear friends, to serve the "living" God. Many men have a dead God still. They do not feel that he hears their prayers, they do not feel the power of his Spirit moving upon their hearts and lives. They never take the Lord into their calculations; he never fills them with joy, nor even depresses them with fear; God is unreal and inactive to them. But the true convert turns to the living God, who is everywhere, and whose presence affects him at every point of his being. This God he is to worship, obey, and serve.

Then it is added, to serve the *true* God; and there is no serving a true God with falsehood. Many evidently serve a false god, for they utter words of prayer without their hearts, and that is false prayer, unfit for the true God, who must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. When men's lives are false and artificial they are not a fit service for the God of truth. A life is false when it is not the true outcome of the soul, when it is fashioned by custom, ruled by observation, restrained by selfish motives, and governed by the love of human approbation. What a man does against his will is not in truth done by himself at all. If the will is not changed the man is not converted, and his religious life is not true. He that serves the true God acceptably does it with delight; to him sin is misery, and holiness is happiness. This is the sort of service which we desire our converts to render: we long to see rebels become sons. Oh the sacred alchemy of the Holy Spirit, who can turn men from being the slaves of sin to become servants of righteousness!

Carefully notice the order of life's progress: the entering in of the word produces conversion, and this produces service. Do not put those things out of their places. If you are converts without the word entering into you, you are unconverted; and if professing to receive the word you are not turned by it, you have not received it. If you claim to be converted, and yet do not serve God, you are not converted; and if you boast of serving God without being converted, you are not serving God. The three things are links which draw on each other.

A fourth matter follows to complete this Christian biography, namely, *waiting*—"To wait for his Son from heaven." That conversion which is not followed up by waiting is a false conversion, and will come to nothing. We wait, dear brethren, in the holy perseverance of faith; having begun with Christ Jesus our Lord we abide in him; we trust, and then we wait. We do not look upon salvation as a thing which requires a few minutes of faith, and then all is over; salvation is the

business of our lives. We receive salvation in an instant, but we work it out with fear and trembling all our days. He that is saved continues to be saved, and goes on to be saved from day to day, from every sin and from every form of evil. We must wait upon the Lord, and renew the strength of the life which he has imparted. As a servant waiteth on her mistress, or a courtier upon his king, so must we wait upon the Lord.

This waiting also takes the shape of living in the future. A man who waits is not living on the wages of to-day, but on the recompenses of a time which is yet to come; and this is the mark of the Christian, that his life is spent in eternity rather than in time, and his citizenship is not of earth but of heaven. He has received a believing expectancy which makes him both watch and wait. He expects that the Lord Jesus will come a second time, and that speedily. He has read of his going up into heaven, and he believes it; and he knows that he will so come in like manner as he went up into heaven. For the second advent he looks with calm hope: he does not know when it may be, but he keeps himself on the watch as a servant who waits his lord's return. He hopes it may be to-day, he would not wonder if it were to-morrow, for he is always looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Son of God. The coming of the Lord is his expected reward. He does not expect to be rewarded by men, or even to be rewarded of God with temporal things in this life, for he has set his affection upon things yet to be revealed, things eternal and infinite. In the day when the Christ shall come, and the heavens which have received him shall restore him to our earth, he shall judge the world in righteousness, and his people with his truth, and then shall our day break and our shadows flee away. The true believer lives in this near future; his hopes are with Jesus on his throne, with Jesus crowned before an assembled universe.

The convert has come to this condition, he is assured of his salvation. See how he has been rising from the time when he first held the door ajar! He is assured of his salvation; for Paul describes him as one who is delivered from the wrath to come; and therefore he looks with holy delight to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Once he was afraid of this, for he feared that he would come to condemn him; but now he knows that when the Lord appears his justification will be made plain to the eyes of all men. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father." And so he cries, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" He would hasten rather than delay the appearing of the Lord. He groans in sympathy with travailing creation for the manifestation of the sons of God. He cries with all the redeemed host for the day of the Saviour's glory. He could not do this were he not abundantly assured that the day would not seal his destruction, but reveal his full salvation.

Here, then, you have the story of the Christian man briefly summed up, and I think you will not find a passage of merely human writing which contains so much in so small a compass. It has unspeakable wealth packed away into a narrow casket. Do you understand it? Is this the outline of your life? If it is not, the Lord grant that his word may have an entrance into you this morning, that you may now believe in Jesus Christ and then wait for his glorious appearing.

II. I shall want you to be patient with me while I very briefly

unfold the second half of this great roll. Here even to a greater degree we have *multum in parvo*, much in little; A BODY OF DIVINITY packed away in a nutshell. "To wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

To begin my body of divinity, I see here, first, *the Deity of Christ.* "To wait for his Son." "His Son." God has but one Son in the highest sense. The Lord Jesus Christ has given to all believers power to become the sons of God, but not in the sense in which he, and he alone, is the Son of God. "Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" "When he bringeth in the First-begotten into the world he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him." The Eternal Filiation is a mystery into which it is better for us never to pry. Believe it; but how it is, or how it could be, certainly it is not for you or for me to attempt to explain. There is one "Son of the Highest," who is "God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before all worlds," whom we with all our souls adore, and own to be most truly God; doing so especially every time in the benediction we associate him with the Father and with the Holy Spirit as the one God of blessing.

Side by side with this in this text of mine is *his humanity.* "His Son, whom he raised from the dead." It is for man to die. God absolutely considered dieth not; he therefore took upon himself our mortal frame, and was made in fashion as a man; then willingly for our sakes he underwent the pangs of death, and being crucified, was dead, and so was buried, even as the rest of the dead. He was truly man, "of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting": of that we are confident. There has been no discussion upon that point in these modern times, but there was much questioning thereon in years long gone; for what is there so clear that men will not doubt it or mystify it? With us there is no question either as to his Deity, which fills us with reverence; or his manhood, which inspires us with joy. He is the Son of God and the Son of Mary. He, as God, is "immortal, invisible"; and yet for our sakes he was seen of men and angels, and in mortal agony yielded up the ghost. He suffered for our salvation, died upon the cross, and was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa, being verily and truly man.

Notice a third doctrine which is here, and that is *the unity of the Divine Person of our Lord;* for while the apostle speaks of Christ as God's Son from heaven, and as one who had died, he adds, "even Jesus": that is to say, one known, undivided Person. Although he be God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ. There is but one Person of our blessed and adorable Lord: "one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of Person." He is God, he is man; perfect God and perfect man; and, as such, Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man. There have been mistakes about this also made in the church, though I trust not by any one of us here present. We worship the Lord Jesus Christ in the unity of his divine Person as the one Saviour of men.

Furthermore, in our text we perceive a doctrine about ourselves very plainly implied, namely, that *men by nature are guilty*, for otherwise they would not have needed Jesus, a Saviour. They were lost, and so

he who came from heaven to earth bore the name of Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins." It is clear, my brethren, that we were under the divine wrath, otherwise it could not be said, "He hath delivered us from the wrath to come." We who are now delivered were once "children of wrath, even as others." And when we are delivered it is a meet song to sing, "O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." We were guilty, else we had not needed a propitiation by the Saviour's death: we were lost, else we had not needed one who should seek and save that which is lost; and we were hopelessly lost, otherwise God himself would not have shared our nature to work the mighty work of our redemption. That truth is in the text, and a great deal more than I can mention just now.

But the next doctrine, which is one of the fundamentals of the gospel, is that *the Lord Jesus Christ died for these fallen men.* He could not have been raised from the dead if he had not died. That death was painful, and ignominious; and it was also substitutionary: "for the transgression of my people was he stricken." In the death of Christ lay the essence of our redemption. I would not have you dissociate his life from his death, it comes into his death as an integral part of it; for as the moment we begin to live we, in a sense, begin to die, so the Man of Sorrows lived a dying life, which was all preparatory to his passion. He lived to die, panting for the baptism wherewith he was to be baptized, and reaching forward to it. But it was especially, though not only, by his death upon the cross that Jesus put away our sin. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Not even the tears of Christ, nor the labours of Christ could have redeemed us if he had not given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice. "Die he, or justice must," or man must die. It was his bowing the head and giving up of the ghost which finished the whole work. "It is finished" could not have been uttered except by a bleeding, dying Christ. His death is our life. Let us always dwell upon that central truth, and when we are preaching Christ risen, Christ reigning, or Christ coming, let us never so preach any of them as to overshadow Christ crucified. "We preach Christ crucified." Some have put up as their ensign, "We preach Christ glorified"; and we also preach the same; but yet to us it seems that the first and foremost view of Jesus by the sinner is as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Therefore do we preach first Christ crucified, while at the same time we do not forget that blessed hope of the child of God,—namely, Christ in glory soon to descend from heaven.

The next doctrine I see in my text is *the acceptance of the death of Christ by the Father.* "Where is that?" say you. Look! "Whom he raised from the dead." Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but the Father had a distinct hand therein. God as God gave the token of his acceptance of Christ's sacrifice by raising him from the dead. It is true, as we sometimes sing,

> "If Jesus had not paid the debt,
> He ne'er had been at freedom set."

The Surety would have been held in prison to this day if he had not

discharged his suretyship engagements, and wiped out all the liabilities of his people. Therefore it is written, "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." In his glorious uprising from the dead lies the assurance that we are accepted, accepted in the Beloved: the Beloved being himself certainly accepted because God brought him again from the dead.

Further on, we have another doctrine, among many more. We have here the doctrine of *our Lord's resurrection*, of which we spake when we mentioned the acceptance of his offering. Christ is risen from the dead. I pray you, do not think of the Lord Jesus Christ as though he were now dead. It is well to dwell upon Gethsemane, Golgotha, and Gabbatha; but pray remember the empty tomb, Emmaus, Galilee, and Olivet. It is not well to think of Jesus as for ever on the cross or in the tomb. "He is not here, but he is risen." Ye may "come and see the place where the Lord lay," but he lies there no longer; he hath burst the bands of death by which he could not be holden; for it was not possible that God's holy One could see corruption. The rising of Jesus from the dead is that fact of facts which establishes Christianity upon an historical basis, and at the same time guarantees to all believers their own resurrection from the dead. He is the firstfruits and we are the harvest.

Further, there is here the doctrine of *his ascension*: "to wait for his Son from heaven." It is clear that Jesus is in heaven, or he could not come from it. He has gone before us as our Forerunner. He has gone to his rest and reward; a cloud received him out of sight; he has entered into his glory.

I doubt not our poet is right when he says of the angels—

> "They brought his chariot from on high,
> To bear him to his throne;
> Clapped their triumphant wings and cried,
> 'The glorious work is done!'"

That ascension of his brought us the Holy Spirit. He "led captivity captive, and received gifts for men," and he gave the Holy Ghost as the largess of his joyous entry to his Father's courts, that man on earth might share in the joy of the Conqueror returning from the battle. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in," was the song of that bright day.

But the text tells us more: not only that he has gone into heaven, but that *he remains there;* for these Thessalonians were expecting him to come "from heaven," and therefore he was there. What is he doing? "I go to prepare a place for you." What is he doing? He is interceding with authority before the throne. What is he doing? He is from yonder hill-top looking upon his church, which is as a ship upon the sea buffeted by many a storm. In the middle watch ye shall see him walking on the waters; for he perceives the straining of the oars, the leakage of the timbers, the rending of the sails, the dismay of the pilot, the trembling of the crew; and he will come unto us, and save us. He is sending heavenly succours to his weary ones; he is ruling all things for the salvation of his elect, and the accomplishment of his purposes. Glory be to his blessed name!

Jesus is in heaven with saving power, too, and that also is in the text: "His Son from heaven, even Jesus, which delivereth us from the wrath to come." I alter the translation, for it is a present participle in the case of each verb, and should run, "Even Jesus, delivering us from the wrath coming." He is at this moment delivering. "Wherefore also he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." He is away in heaven, but he is not divided from us; he is working here the better because he is there. He has not separated himself from the service and the conflict here below; but he has taken the post from which he can best observe and aid. Like some great commander who in the day of battle commands a view of the field, and continues watching, directing, and so winning the fight, so is Jesus in the best place for helping us. Jesus is the master of legions, bidding his angels fly hither and thither, where their spiritual help is needed. My faith sees him securing victory in the midst of the earth. My God, my King, thou art working all things gloriously from thy vantage ground, and ere long the groans and strifes of battle shall end in Hallelujahs unto the Lord God Omnipotent! Christ's residence in the heavens is clearly in the text.

Here is conspicuously set forth *the second coming*, a subject which might well have occupied all our time,—"To wait for his Son from heaven." Every chapter of this epistle closes with the Second Advent. Do not deceive yourselves, oh ye ungodly men who think little of Jesus of Nazareth! The day will come when you will change your minds about him. As surely as he died, he lives, and as surely as he lives he will come to this earth again! With an innumerable company of angels, with blast of trumpet that shall strike dismay into the heart of all his enemies, Jesus comes! And when he cometh there shall be a time of judgment, and the rising again of the dead, and "Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." He may come to-morrow! We know not the times and the seasons; these things are in the Father's keeping; but that he comes is certain, and that he will come as a thief in the night to the ungodly is certain too. Lay no flattering unction to your souls as though when he was crucified there was an end of him; it is but the beginning of his dealings with you, though you reject him. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

A further doctrine in the text is that *Christ is a deliverer*—"Jesus delivering us from the wrath coming." What a blessed name is this! Deliverer! Press the cheering title to your breast. He delivereth by himself bearing the punishment of sin. He has delivered, he is delivering, he always will deliver them that put their trust in him.

But there was something to be delivered from, and that is, *the coming wrath*, which is mentioned here. "Oh," saith one, "that is a long way off, that wrath to come!" If it were a long way off it were wise for you to prepare for it. He is unsafe who will be destroyed most certainly, however distant that destruction may be. A wise man should not be content with looking as an ox doth, as far as his eye can carry him, for there is so much beyond, as sure as that which is seen. But it is not far-off wrath which is here mentioned; the text saith, "who

delivereth us from the wrath coming"; that is, the wrath which is now coming; for wrath is even now upon the unbelieving. As for those Jews who had rejected Christ, the apostle says of them in the sixteenth verse of the next chapter, "Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." The siege of Jerusalem, and the blindness of Israel, are a terrible comment upon these words. "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile." It is said of every one that believeth not in Christ Jesus, that "the wrath of God abideth on him." "God is angry with the wicked every day." This wrath abideth upon some of you. It is the joy of believers that they are delivered from this wrath which is daily coming upon unbelievers, and would come upon themselves if they had not been delivered from it by the atoning sacrifice.

There is evidently in the text the doctrine of *a great division* between men and men. "He hath delivered *us*." All men have not faith, and therefore all men are not delivered from wrath. To-day there is such a division; the "condemned-already" and the "justified" are living side by side; but ere long the separation shall be more apparent. While some will go away into everlasting punishment, the people of God will be found pardoned and absolved, and so will be glorified for ever.

Lastly, there is here the doctrine of *assurance*. Some say, "How are you to know that you are saved?" It can be known; it ought to be known. "Surely," cries one, "it is presumption to say that you are sure." It is presumption to live without knowing that you are delivered from wrath. Here the apostle speaks of it as a thing well known, that "Jesus delivers us from the wrath coming." He does not say "if," or "perhaps," but he writes that it is so, and therefore he knew it, and we may know it. My brother, you may know that you are saved. "That would make me inexpressibly happy," cries one. Just so, and that is one of the reasons why we would have you know it this day. God saith, "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life," and therefore the believer may be sure that he has it. Our message is, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." God make you to escape that dreadful doom! May you be delivered from the wrath which is coming for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts xvii. 1—10; 1 Thessalonians i.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—485, 483, 484.

MRS. SPURGEON'S BOOK FUND REPORT for a previous year was asked for long after the last copy had been sold, and we were unable to oblige late applicants for the work. This year we printed a larger number, and are able to supply all demands. This most interesting little book can be purchased for 6d., by order of any bookseller; or we will send it post free for 7d. Passmore & Alabaster, 4, Paternoster Buildings.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A CALL TO THE LORD'S OWN FLOCK.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 2ND, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God."—Ezekiel xxxiv. 30, 31.

THE sermon of this morning is intended for the flock of God, and it will be directed very pointedly to that particular part of it here gathered in fellowship. God has been coming very near to us of late; for a considerable number of brethren and sisters have fallen asleep during the last few days; nearly all of them persons of ripe age, who have been gathered as sheaves in their season. Others are evidently upon the eve of departure, for their infirmities are multiplied, and their strength is small. When the Good Shepherd is taking one and another into his bosom, and bearing them away from us, the rest of us ought to recognize his presence with holy reverence. Let us feel that the ground whereon we stand is holy, and that the time is most suitable for increased devotedness of life. Let us number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom. If we do not live when life is seen to be so short, how foolish we must be! If we do not arouse ourselves when the Lord is calling home our brethren, we must be sluggards indeed. Let us spend the time of our sojourning here in fear, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.

This is the special matter of which I would speak to-day. God has in great mercy gathered to himself a church in this place for these many years. He has multiplied the people and increased their joy, and we have joyed before him as with the joy of harvest. Nothing has happened to mar our unity or prevent our success; for God has been with us. Many have been added to us of such as are saved, and we have gone from strength to strength in Christian enterprise, never failing to accomplish our work. But the tendency of all human things is to deteriorate; there is a down-dragging influence in the world, and we ourselves are such creatures of the earth that we all too easily yield to its attractions. If we run well for a time, yet we grow weary, and slacken our pace. This we do all the more readily, and unconsciously, if we are surrounded by those whose pace is slow. We are apt to think that our running is faster

than need be, and that we shall be quite as well thought of if we keep up with the many, or are just a trifle in advance of them. Oh, how soon shall we lag in the rear if we listen to this evil suggestion! The voice of the Spirit to the church of Philadelphia was, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." It is a great thing to have done so well as to have a crown; it is a greater thing to hold it fast. Men of the world tell us that it takes much wit and industry to make a fortune; but that it is far more difficult to keep it when it is made: I am sure that in spiritual things it is so. For a church to be thoroughly prosperous in the life and work of God is difficult enough; but to continue so,—this is the work, this is the labour. Hence our cries to God that he will be pleased to keep us as a church faithful to his truth, united with one another, earnest in the glorifying of God, and diligent in the winning of souls. It would be a calamity of no mean order if this church should decline. For the sake of those unpopular truths which we uphold, it is a matter for daily prayer that this church may be maintained in honourable usefulness evermore. To that end I wish to speak with you this morning, my own dear brethren and sisters. Strangers must pardon me if I make much of you, and even seem to be egotistical in my address. I risk all that for the sake of the necessary truth which I must put before you.

To my mind, this day is a day of good tidings. The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad. Let us glory in his holy name; and let us walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, so that we may enjoy a continuance of his favour. May the outstretched arm of the Most High still be with us, that we may see more and more of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ towards fallen man.

I. Calling your attention to our text, I shall notice, first, what the text rather suggests than declares, namely, OUR PROFESSION TOWARDS GOD. Read on,—"Thus shall they know that I Jehovah am their God." It is implied, then, that *we avow Jehovah to be our God.* So many of us as are joined together in church fellowship here have declared that Jehovah is the one only living and true God. He has revealed himself to us in these latter days as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we unfeignedly accept the triune God as our God for ever and ever. Other lords have had dominion over us, but now we yield ourselves unto God without reserve. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God of believers to this day. We do not wish to have any other God, although in these days the carnally wise have set up another. Their god is a god who has no justice or righteousness: he takes small account of sin, and mainly seeks to make things pleasant all round. This effeminate deity now occupies the place once given to Apollo or Venus, and he is as much a false god as they were. Our God does not suffer one attribute to eclipse another; he has all excellencies in perfection. Remember how Moses spake concerning our God, and said, "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty." "This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

A second profession we have made is this, that *we are his people.* "That they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God." This is involved in the first profession, but it is not always

sufficiently thought of. We are, as believers, in common with all the people of God, separated unto his service, consecrated to his glory. We believe that he chose us, or ever the earth was, to be a peculiar people unto himself. We believe that he hath redeemed us from among men, according to that word, "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it." We believe that by the decree of God we are adopted into the divine family and acknowledged to be the children of the living God, even we who were once heirs of wrath even as others. We are his people because the Holy Spirit has wrought upon us, and we have been turned from darkness to light, from the power of sin and Satan unto God. Our song is, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." We acknowledge the claim founded upon our redemption, "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price." To glorify God in our spirits and in our bodies, which are alike redeemed, is our reasonable service. Our bands are loosed, we are no more the servants of men: new bonds are about us, for we are now the servants of the living God. In Jehovah is our trust, our joy, our glory. Each one of us can say, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." To serve him is its own reward. To dwell with him is heaven. Is it not so with you, my brethren? Have you not lifted up your hands unto the Lord so that you cannot go back? Do you not wish to realise that promise, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people"?

Further than that, we have also professed and avowed *our joyful confidence in our Immanuel—God with us.* It is an interesting thing to me that this name should be in my text. Look carefully at the English and you will see it in the very first sentence—"that I the Lord their God am with them." Leave out the word "am," which is in italics, and you get it, "God with them." What is this but "God with us"? To-day we believe in the Lord Jesus, who is God with us. God hath come down among men; he hath taken upon himself their nature, so that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and man in one ever-blessed and indivisible person, and therefore he is very nigh unto us, yea, next of kin to us. We rejoice in him as "God with us,"—our brother, friend, and husband. Have we not found it so? Has there not been a divine nearness between our souls and Christ since that first day when we touched his garment's hem and were made whole? Why, brethren, we have gone on to lean our heads upon his bosom in heavenly rest, like John of old; yea, some of you have emulated Simeon; for you have taken up the Lord's Christ into your arms and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Through Christ Jesus we do not only believe in God as yonder in heaven, but in God by his Holy Spirit dwelling here among men, stirring our hearts, ruling our lives, enlightening our understandings, hallowing our affections, and sanctifying our whole being unto God. Is it not so? You do so confess.

This is a very large profession. We are not inclined to start back from it; but when we take it in its threefold character,—this God our God, ourselves his people, and himself, by his Son Jesus Christ, "God with us,"—oh, then I say it is a very solemn avowal, and one which calls us to a lofty form of life. Blessed are they who stand to this confession, and walk worthily of it; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto them.

Jehovah is our God, in opposition to Romanism and Ritualism, with their idols of one form and another, to which they bow the knee. The invisible Jehovah is our God, and not the host, the virgin, the crucifix, or any visible thing. Jehovah is our God in opposition to the new gods of "modern thought," which your fathers knew not: our faith finds light as well in the majesty of the Old Testament as in the mercy of the New. Jehovah is our God in opposition to the "no God" of infidelity. We believe in a personal God, and we put our trust in him as hearing our prayers; we are his people, and on him we call; he has come very near to us, and with him we have sweet communion through Jesus Christ his Son. This is our profession: we dare not say less; we could not say more.

Now every profession of so solemn a sort should be backed up with proof. Where shall the proof be found?

II. That shall be our second subject of discourse—OUR PROOF FROM GOD. "Thus shall they know that I Jehovah am with them, and that they are my people, saith the Lord God." How shall they know it? In this one way,—by the presence of God among us. If God work among us, then shall even our adversaries say, "Jehovah-Shammah," the Lord is there. A tree is known by its fruit, and the rule applies even to God himself. God is known among us by the acts that he doeth. He discovers his presence unto his people by his deeds of grace. I want you to look back through the chapter and then to see whether we have or have not as a church the marks of Jehovah's presence, by which we are attested to be his people.

The first mark is *the gathering in of the scattered.* See verse eleven. "Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep." I am bound to bear witness that in the midst of us many have been sought out and saved who but a little while ago were wandering far away from Christ. Whenever I give notice that I will see friends who wish to join the church, I am cheered by the many who present themselves. They fly as doves to their windows. They tell me glad news of their conversion—news which makes my heart to leap for joy. The Lord calls some who were grossly ignorant of the gospel, to whom it came as a fresh light from heaven; and he calls others who knew the truth, but slighted it, and turned away from it year after year. He removes hard-heartedness and indifference by his grace. His own voice calls men, and they come to him. Conversions are among us at this time very many; not only from my own preaching of the word, else might I speak with less freedom, but from the school, the mission-stations, the street-preaching, the tract-distributing, and from every form of effort. Frequently, when I have spoken with a number of new converts, I have found the larger proportion not brought to Jesus Christ by my word from this platform, but brought to him by you, dear brothers and sisters, who have laid yourselves out to win souls. I am but one, and you are many; there should be more fruit to the Lord from five thousand of you than from me. I have desired this, and prayed for it, that you all may be useful. May God multiply you, and make you spiritual parents, every one of you, till we may quote the

words of Solomon's Song, and apply them to you,—"They are like a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them." "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit"; so said your Lord, and ye will not forget his words. Conversion is the sure sign of the immediate presence of the Lord. I pray him to give us a token of his being with us this morning in your conversion, O wounded heart! May some poor trembler come to Jesus, some penitent plead the promise, "I will heal that which is broken," some wanderer look to the cross and live. The Lord has promised that he will search his sheep and seek them out, and he has fulfilled that word in our midst, therefore is he with us. If I had to stand here and say to you, "Brethren, there are no conversions, none are brought to repentance and faith," then might we hold days for fasting and humiliation, and we might each one weep his eyes out, because the glory has departed. But the Lord has not left us. No ear has heard the awful words within the holy place saying, "Let us go hence." Glory be to his name, his hand is stretched out still for miracles of grace.

A second token of the Lord's presence is *the feeding of the flock.* The Holy Spirit seems to lay great stress upon that; for thus saith the Lord in verse fifteen: "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down. There shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed." Have we not found it so? Have not our Sabbaths been times of holy festival? Has not the King himself banqueted with us? At the communion-table have we not been transported with such joys as can never be excelled until we behold the Chief Shepherd face to face? When we speak with one another at the close of the Sabbath-day is not the greeting habitual to some of us, "The Lord has been with us again to-day"? You have wished that there were six Sundays and only one work-day in the week. I know that many of you have fed upon the word with great delight. Value greatly this boon, for it comes not from man, but is a choice gift of God. There are congregations where the sheep look up and are not fed; there are places where the Sabbath is the most wearisome day of the week, because the people want the gospel and the gospel is withheld from them. Saints of God cannot feed upon the husks of philosophical systems or semi-rationalistic speculations. The speech which is half of Ashdod and half of Jerusalem suits not the inhabitant of Zion, it is a strange language to him. God grant to this flock, whoever may be their pastor in years to come, that they may relish the gospel, and find it sweet to their palates, and strengthening to their hearts.

Another token of the presence of the Good Shepherd is *the healing of the sick;* I mean the spiritually sick, for there is this promise given, "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." It is a rare joy to restore such as have been overtaken in a fault. Lately I have received several brethren and sisters who had aforetime gone from us through laxity of life or through falling into novelties of opinion. I am glad to see among those who come to unite with us familiar faces which for a while had been missed. Those who have lived where Jesus dwells do not feel easy till they return to such society.

They are saying, "We will return to our brethren, with whom we assembled beforetime, for it was better with us then than now." The presence of the Lord acts like a charm upon the wanderers, and they hasten to return at his bidding. It is pleasant to hear the returning penitent confess how cold in heart he grew, and how he sought to find satisfaction in the things of the world, and to hear him tell how he has been brought back to be in future more resolutely faithful, and more humbly dependent upon God. The showers of grace which have fallen upon us have caused many withered branches to bud forth again. Many are singing, "He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." If there should have strayed in here this morning any who once were among believers, and happy in the Lord, but have been away for a while, and have lost the fervour of their love, let me entreat them to hasten their return. O my brother, come back! O my sister, come back! We shall welcome you with intense delight. Like as the man who lost one sheep left the ninety-and-nine to find it, and rejoiced more over the finding of the one lost sheep than over the ninety-and-nine that had not gone astray, so will it be with us. If backsliders are not brought back in any church, I should conclude that God is not there; but when they do come back, we rejoice in this evidence of his presence. The God of our salvation hath devised means to bring home his banished, and therefore he is still in the midst of us. Glory be to his condescending love!

A further proof of the presence of God in a church is when *the Lord Jesus Christ is greatly honoured;* for here it is written, "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I, Jehovah, will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it." O brothers, if we did not gather to the name of Christ our gathering would not be a church of God. If the testimony which issues from our midst were not of Jesus, and of his precious blood, and of his kingdom, and of his coming, then we might know that the Lord was not with us, for only as we know Christ will God know us. If your faith rested anywhere but in the glorious person and finished work of the Son of God, it were a worthless faith. If I preached any other gospel than that which ye have received I should be an Anathema, and not a servant of God. And if you did not labour with all your might to bring souls to Jesus rather than to any sect or party, and to set Jesus forth rather than any peculiar *ism*, then might we rest assured that the Lord was not with us. But in this matter we are clear, for to us Christ is all. Do you not love Jesus? I appeal to your hearts, ye that have been baptized into the thrice holy name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

> "Is not his name melodious still
> To your attentive ear?
> Does not your heart with pleasure bound,
> Your Saviour's voice to hear?"

If a Sunday should roll by without Christ, would it not be the reverse of a Sabbath to you? You would sadly miss the risen One on his own resurrection day. If we should gather together, and there should be no discourse concerning him, and no savour of his name, would you not go

away disappointed? He is the first and the last of our hope, the author and finisher of our faith, the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely; and just in proportion as it is so, the Lord is with us. He will never forget those who honour his Son, and seek to advance his kingdom.

Jesus is our prince; his authority is supreme among us. No popes, bishops, or councils may legislate for us. Jesus is our king. If he be indeed the Lord of whom we are the loyal subjects, then the Lord our God is with us, and we are his people. Where Jesus is there dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily. As he that believeth in him hath everlasting life, so hath he fellowship with the living God. You shall judge for yourselves whether this be not the token among us that our profession is no lie, but that Jehovah is our God, and we are his people.

A further evidence of the Lord's presence with a people is found in *their prevailing peace of mind.* "I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." Do not many of you realise that deep peace, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, so that you are free from all fear, and happy amid grievous poverty and trial? By reason of your great numbers, I cannot converse much with you personally while you are in health, but I do have the sorrowful privilege of speaking with many brethren and sisters in the time of sickness and death; and my uniform experience is most joyful. To this statement I can remember no exception whatever within my memory. When our members come near to die they exhibit peace—deep, profound; and frequently joy is mingled therewith, and a holy exultation. I have said, again and again, as I have left the sick chamber, "Let me go that I may die with him." Though emaciated, and perhaps full of agonising pain, each one of our friends has said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." They have had no more doubt about the divine verities than about their own existence, and no more fear when looking into eternity than they had in going upstairs to their bed—nay, not so much, for they have had a longing to depart and to be with Christ. "Our people die well," said Wesley; and I can say the same. They pass away in sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection. Not long ago, one who preaches far other doctrine than mine complained bitterly that he could make no headway with people of your sort, because those who have once fallen under the influence of our doctrine are settled in it, and cannot be rescued from it. He said that no headway could be made against our views, for men become so desperately enamoured of them that they cannot be weaned from them. Blessed be God for that. Let a man once know the living God, and feel his eternal love within his bosom, and all the devils in hell cannot make him leave the doctrine which is life unto his soul. Argument is useless against truth written upon the heart. Sophistry cannot persuade us out of our consciousness. The truth of God has been sealed upon our hearts, and it is not possible that we should renounce it. In this I do rejoice, that the evil beasts cease out of the land. When the doctrines of grace flame forth in the midst of a people, doubters and heretics quit the place in disgust. "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon."

Wolves shun the flock when the Chief Shepherd is in the midst of it. So may it be even to the end of the chapter,—sure evidence that God is with his people, giving them deep peace of mind, and solid rest as to the things of God. These tokens we have, and many others which we cannot now stay to mention: read the chapter through and judge for yourselves.

I desire to speak to you with no flattering words, but wish soberly to testify what I have seen, desiring ever to be taught of the Spirit of God, that I may speak no further than I can justify by fact. I can say, and do say, "The Lord of hosts is with us." What then? Then it seems to me that *it becomes every member of this church*, as indeed of every other, *to be very careful how he lives and walks*. If the Lord be with us, remember there is a discipline going on in the church every day; not only that which the church can execute by itself, but that which God in providence executes. "His fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor." Good men, if they hinder the work of God, are not dealt with as the ungodly, and suffered to go on their evil way, but frequently they are laid aside, and their influence is taken from them. Even more than this: I doubt not that many are removed by death when they become obstacles to the truth, or fall into sin. "For this cause," said Paul to the Corinthians, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Thus believers are chastened of the Lord that they should not be condemned with the world. God will not have his own child transgress the rules of his house without chastising him. Hence the need of careful behaviour on the part of church members. If any of you who are God's children are walking carelessly, if your garments are spotted with the world, if you are dishonouring the name of your Lord by an unhallowed conversation, the Lord will not walk with you in joyful fellowship. "Many walk, of whom I have told you often," said the apostle, "and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ"; these were inside the church, and yet enemies. None can hinder the work of God so much as God's professed people if they are not true to their profession. Beloved, to live up to that which I laid down at the commencement of this sermon will require more power than we possess. We shall want the Spirit of God abundantly to rest upon us, that our walk may be close with God, and our actions such as become the gospel of Christ.

In addition to this, it seems to me that if God be with us, *now is the time for abounding activities*. In evil days we tug the labouring oar to small purpose, for the vessel makes no progress against the tide; but now that a favouring wind is with us, let us spread every yard of sail. "Crowd all thy canvas on, cut through the foam." Now is the mariner's happy hour, and he must avail himself of it. If there be anything more that we can do, if there be any forgotten enterprise which we can revive, if there be a possibility of greater ardour, and intenser zeal, in the name of God let us rise to it. Let us withhold no power from the Lord's service, lest measurably upon us also should come the curse pronounced of old: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." It is a day of good tidings, we do not

well if we sit still. See to it, ye servants of God, that ye prove by your activity that the Lord is among you.

Again, *let our prayers be more fervent.* Nothing comforts my heart like the prayer-meetings which are so continual among us. Even the little gathering for prayer which meets on Thursday before my sermon has grown to larger proportions, and we have delightful seasons of communion with God. As for our Monday-evening assemblies, what a benediction from the Lord! Now that our hundreds at prayer are verging into thousands it delights my heart to see them. I had hardly hoped to see so many constantly coming to pray. May your prayerfulness at home, in your families and in your closets, be increased continually. What cannot the Lord do with a church if it will but be ready to be used? All things are possible to him; and all things are possible to him that believeth. In general the Lord says to his people, "Ye have not, because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss"; but when the spirit of supplication is poured out, then, verily, the Lord is there. We love each other with a pure heart, fervently, therefore let us remove everything that could mar our perfect unity in Christ Jesus, for then shall we have continually abundant evidence that we have taken the Lord to be our God, that we are his people, and that he is God with us, and that his glory dwells among us. Thus have I tried to press the matter home upon you. The Lord bless the exhortation.

III. A very interesting part of our discourse this morning lies in OUR DESCRIPTION BY GOD. How does God describe his own church? Read the last verse of the text. "Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God."

First, in this description God calls his church *his flock.* A flock is the shepherd's treasure, it is his living wealth; but it is also the shepherd's care, it is his constant anxiety. Ask a shepherd what he prizes most, and he tells you, of course, his flock. Demand what he cares for most, and he replies, "I have no other care but this, my flock; for this I spend my days in the heat and my nights in the damp and the cold." Only think of the Lord's looking down upon his people here and saying, "Ye are my flock." Some Christians try to go to heaven alone, in solitude; but believers are not compared to bears, or lions, or other animals that wander alone; but those who belong to Christ are sheep in this respect, that they love to get together. Sheep go in flocks, and so do God's people. The Lord loves them best as a company.

> "He likes the tents of Jacob well,
> But still in Zion loves to dwell."

Christ is the good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep; and he folds them, guards them, protects them as his flock. A true church is therefore a very precious thing; it is not a mere human society banded together for certain objects, but it is a community which God himself hath formed, and over which he doth watch with an unsleeping eye. It is a flock which he cares for, so that heaven and earth shall be ransacked but what he will have provender for them. This flock is so well preserved that at the last the great Shepherd will say, "Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none."

Observe that it is added, "*The flock of my pasture.*" There is a

different idea here. It shows that God's people are not only peculiar in other things, but they are peculiar in their feeding. You may know a child of God by that which his soul lives upon. Many professors can feed on any mortal thing, so long as it is cleverly put. "Have you heard So-and-so preach?" "No, I have not, but I have heard that he has departed from the truth." "But," says one, "he is a wonderfully clever man;" and if a man is only clever, the generality of people will accept anything he likes to bring, from heaven above, or from the earth beneath, or from the waters under the earth. It does not matter to most people so long as the man can deliver his opinions fluently and poetically. But such are not Christ's sheep, for they have not the discernment of the faithful. "The sheep follow him, for they know his voice; and a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." I remember hearing a brother tell how he disproved the notion that sheep only know the shepherd by his dress. When in Palestine he asked a shepherd to allow him to put on his clothes. Then he began to call the sheep, but never a one would come, not even a lamb. The most sheepish of the flock had sense enough left to know that he was not the shepherd, and even the youngest kept aloof, heedless of the stranger's voice. He might have called till he was hoarse, but they would not come. So God's people know their Lord, and they know the kind of food which he gives them. They know the truth from a lie. Men put the falsehood so prettily that they would deceive, if it were possible, the very elect; but that "if it were possible" guards the chosen flock of God's pasture. They will not graze on the hemlock, nor feed on poisoned grain. They will have nothing but clean provender, and the more evidently it comes from the great Shepherd's own hand the better it is to them.

It is a very singular thing, but it is added, "Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, *are men.*" This was inserted, some commentators think, lest the reader should think that the Lord was really speaking of sheep. This cannot be true; for no rational being could be so foolish as to fall into that mistake. The language is used for a much higher purpose. "Ye are men": then God knows what kind of persons we are, whom he has loved with an everlasting love. We are Adams, not angels. If you come into the church of God, and expect to get among angels, you will be mightily mistaken; and if the brethren should receive you, and hope that they are receiving angels unawares, they will be mistaken, too. We make absurd mistakes through foolish expectations. We shall not find that our brethren and sisters are male and female cherubim, for they are men and women, and nothing more. They are fallen men, too, bearing about them traces of the ruin of their nature; they went astray like lost sheep, even the best of them. They are men, that is to say, they are only men; for the best of men are but men at the best. Somebody once wrote to me a letter of denunciation for using that sentence; and, as far as I could make out from his letter, the friend thought himself to be something more than a man. I did not coincide with his judgment, but fancied that he was rather less than more than a man: from the bitter spirit of his letter I thought him more human than humane. The best men I have ever seen are but men; and, generally, the better men are the more ready they are to confess their imperfection. Some are tall

by the measurement of conceit, but short when brought to the standard of wisdom. God's people are but men; yet they are men and not brutes. There are in human form many who are hardly so good as brutes; but the saints are gentle, compassionate and gracious. God's people are true men: when the Spirit of God is in them they quit themselves like men; they come to the front and bear the brunt of the battle. "Ye are men,"—it is a bad word in one sense, but a good one in another. God make us men in the better sense, and may we rise superior to the infirmities of "men" in the worse sense, by being humble, yet brave.

But then he adds this blessed assurance, "*And I am your God.*" God is not a man, that he should lie; nor the son of a man, that he should repent. I hear that poor soul seeking after God, say, "Oh, but I am so unworthy." Just so. The Lord knows it. He says you are men. But then he is not unworthy; he is worthy to receive honour and power divine, for he is our God. "Alas," says one, "I feel myself so weak." Just so. You are men, but then he is your God, your strength is in him. "But I am so changeable." Just so, for you are men; but then he says, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." "But I am so faithless." Just so, for you are men, and men are fickle and frail; but God changeth not, he is the same, and of his years there is no end. If the promises rested on you for keeping, then they would never be kept, for you are men. If your salvation depended on your own merits you would be lost, for you are men; but inasmuch as the whole covenant, and the whole weight of salvation rests with God, here is our joy, "I am your God, saith the Lord God."

I have two words to say. One is to the poor sinner. He says, "I am afraid to come to God in Christ Jesus." Do not be afraid to come, for he knows what you are. "Oh, but I am so vile." He knows how vile you are. "But I am everything I ought not to be." He knows that. That is why he sent a Saviour. If you had not been lost, there would have been no need for him to seek you out. Come to Jesus just as you are, poor trembler, and let this word beckon you to him, "Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men." You are poor, weak, feeble, erring, undeserving men, but your God is full of mercy, and his thoughts of love are as high above your thoughts as the heavens are above the earth. Come now and reason together with him, and he will put away your sins as a cloud and your transgressions as a thick cloud, and you shall sing, "Who is a God like unto thee?"

The other word is to you that ought to be members of the church, who know the Lord and love him, but have never confessed him. You say, "I shall join the church when I feel better." When will that be? Are you any better than you were a year ago? How much better are you going to be before you obey your Lord? I should like to hang up a sort of thermometer so that when you did reach the point you might come out, obey your Lord's command, and join with his church. Do you want to be perfect, and to join with perfect men? If you do, do not come to this church, because I will warrant you there is not a perfect member in it, though there are many of the excellent of the earth in our midst. We had some perfect brethren once; but

they went to their own place after having proved to us that their boasted perfection was very poor stuff. When workers get that proud notion into their heads they become both useless and unloving. We are sorry to say that we are a company of imperfect men and women; but we shall be very glad to receive you if you love the Lord and are prepared to obey his commands. That is all we require. Do you want to join a perfect church? You must die. You will not do it else. And if you were to join a perfect church, I am sure it would not be perfect after you had been admitted into it. You had better give up that idea, and just believe what God says about his own church, "Ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men." Come, then, with us, and we will do thee good. "I am afraid," says one. Is this like a man? Can we say of such cowards, "Ye are men"? We cannot give you the good side of the word, surely. But come with us. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, confess him. The gospel message is, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." Faith and baptism are here placed very closely together: do not divide them. "He that with his heart believeth, and with his mouth maketh confession of him, shall be saved." Neglect not one command of Christ: confess your faith at once. "There is nothing saving in it," say you. Selfish wretch, so you will do nothing except to save your own skin. If you are a saved man, you will loathe such meanness, and you will say, "Now, for the love I bear my Master's name, whatever command he gives to his believing people, I am ready to obey.

"Through floods or flames, if Jesus leads,
I'll follow where he goes;
'Hinder me not,' shall be my cry,
Though earth and hell oppose."

God grant you his blessing in so doing, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ezekiel xxxiv. 11—31.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—100 (Vers. III.), 955, 957.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE THRESHING-FLOOR OF ORNAN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 9TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"At that time when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there."—1 Chronicles xxi. 28.

"Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel."—1 Chronicles xxii. 1.

DAVID was for many years searching for a site for the great temple which he purposed to build for Jehovah his God. It had been ordained that the sacrifices offered to the one God should be offered by all Israel upon one altar; but as yet the ark of the Lord was within curtains, near to David's palace, and the altar of burnt offering was situated at Gibeon. Where should the one altar be erected? Where should the ark find its permanent dwelling-place? David said, "Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." Yet for a long time he received no indication as to the exact spot whereon the Lord's altar should be reared, save only that he was told that the Lord had chosen Zion and desired it for his habitation.

David watched, and waited, and prayed, and in due time he received the sign. God knew the spot, and had consecrated it long before by his appearance unto Abraham. The other Sabbath-day, you remember, our text was "Jehovah-jireh," * and we then learned that in the mount the Lord would be seen. Upon Mount Moriah, on or near that particular spot which had been named Jehovah-jireh, was the temple to be built. Abraham had there unsheathed the knife to slay his son. Wondrous type of the great Father offering up his Only-begotten for the sins of men! The scene of that grand transaction was to be the centre of worship for the chosen people. Where Abraham made the supreme sacrifice, there should his descendants present their offerings. Or if we look into the type and see God there presenting Jesus as a sacrifice for men, it was most suitable that man should for ever sacrifice to God where God made a sacrifice for him. As yet it was not known to David

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that this was the chosen place. Now it is indicated by memorable signs: the angel of justice stands above the spot; and his sword is sheathed there in answer to the cries of the afflicted king, according to the long-suffering mercy of God. Then David clearly saw the mind of the Lord, and said, "This is the house of Jehovah my God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel." Then he commenced at once with double speed to prepare the materials for the temple. Though he knew that he might not build it, since his hands had been stained with blood, yet he would do all that he could to help his son Solomon in the great enterprise.

This problem which David had at last worked out by the good hand of God upon him, is one which in a deep spiritual sense exercises our hearts full often. Where is it that man may meet with God? How is it that man may speak with his offended Lord and be reconciled to him? Is there not some meeting-place where the sinner may express his repentance, and where mercy may grant full absolution? Many are saying, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" Hearts touched by the Spirit of God are still seeking after God if haply they may find him. In what condition, and by what means may man be at peace with God, and dread no longer the sword of his justice?

For the heart of some of us that problem takes a further shape: we know where man may meet with God, but we want to know how the careless, proud, rebellious heart shall be induced to come to God in his appointed way. We know it is by the power of the Holy Ghost, through the preaching of the word, and the uplifting of the all-attracting cross; but we would fain know the state of mind which will lead up to reconciliation; for now we often have to go back to him that sent us, and to cry, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" We would lead men to God by Jesus Christ if we could; we stretch out the finger, and we point the way, but they will not see; we stretch out both hands, and intreat them to come, but they will not yield; our heart breaketh for the longing that it hath to present every man in Christ reconciled unto the living God; but how shall it be? How shall the sinner come unto God?

We may get some light from the type before us upon that question—Where shall God's temple be? How shall men be brought to it? We speak not at this time upon natural things, but upon the things of the Spirit; therefore let us pray the Holy Spirit to enlighten and instruct us, for only by his aid shall spiritual truth enter our hearts!

And, first, I remark that *externally there was, and there is nothing in any place why it should be the peculiar meeting-place of God with man;* but, secondly, that *spiritually the place which God did choose was most suitable;* for in it we read the true ground upon which God does actually meet with men in a way of grace. When we have lingered over these two subjects, we shall then have to exhort you after this fashion, *—heartily let us use the place which God hath set apart to be our meeting-place with himself.* "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."

I. First, then, this truth is believed by you, though, alas! not by all men, that EXTERNALLY THERE IS NOTHING IN ANY PLACE WHY GOD SHOULD THERE MEET WITH MEN.

The Lord chose the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite as the spot whereupon for many a day his holy worship should be openly celebrated according to the outward ceremonies of a typical dispensation. There the Temple was built, and for a thousand years it stood as the centre of Divine worship, so far as it was visibly presented according to his ordinance. What that mount may yet become we will not at this time consider. Prophets give us bright hints of what shall yet be even on Mount Zion, which has so long been trodden under foot of the adversary. But why was the threshing-floor of Ornan to be the meeting-place of David with his God, and the spot where prayer was to be heard?

Certainly it was *a very simple, unadorned, unecclesiastical place.* The threshing-floor of Ornan boasted no magnificence of size, or beauty of construction. There was just the rock, and I suppose a composition spread upon it of hard clay or cement, that the feet of the oxen might the better tread out the corn. That was all it was; yet when the Temple with all its glory crowned the spot, God was never more conspicuously present than on that bare, ungarnished threshing-floor. "Meet God in a barn!" saith one. Why not? Does that astonish you? God met Adam in a garden, Abraham under a tree, and Noah in an ark. There is less of man in the open field than in the cathedral, and where there is least of man there is at least an opportunity to find most of God. "Meet God on a threshing-floor!" Why not? It may be a thousand times more sacred than many a chancel; for there simple minds are likely to pay their homage in hearty truthfulness, while in the other the artificialness of the place may foster formality. God has met with man in a dungeon, in a cave, in a whale's belly. When you have displayed all your skill in architecture, can you secure any more of the Divine presence than the disciples had in the upper room? Can you get as much of it? A tasteful building may be a way of showing your pious regard for the Lord, and so far it may be justifiable and acceptable; but take care that you do not regard it as essential, or even important, or you will make an idol of it. If the church or chapel be esteemed for its form or tastefulness, it will become a mere exhibition of skill and industry, and so be no more sacred than the house of a greedy merchant, or the palace of a profligate prince. No chisel of mason, or hammer of carpenter can build a holy place. Without either of these a spot may be none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven. God chose a threshing-floor for his audience with David, just as aforetime he had chosen to reveal himself in a bush to Moses. His presence had been glorious on the sandy floor of the wilderness, in the midst of the curtains of goats' hair; and now it was gracious among the sheaves and the oxen. How can he that filleth all things care about a house which is made with hands? You know how curtly Stephen dismisses even Solomon's Temple with a word—"but Solomon built him a house. Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." What was that golden fane to the Infinite Majesty? Is not his own Creation sublimer far? No arch can compare with the azure of heaven, no lamps can rival the sun and moon, no masonry can equal that city whose twelve foundations are of precious stones. Thus saith the Lord by the prophet: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my

footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made." Wherefore, then, should he not choose the hill whereon Ornan had made a hardened floor whereon to thresh his corn? At any rate that was the Lord's meeting-place with David, his audience chamber with the suppliant king; as if to show that he careth not for tabernacles or temples, but by his own presence makes that place glorious wherein he reveals himself.

Moreover, it was *a place of ordinary toil*,—not merely a floor, but a threshing-floor in present use, with oxen present, and all the implements of husbandry ready to hand. It was so ordinary, and so everyday a place, that none could have been more so: as if the Lord would say to us, "I will meet you anywhere; I will be with you in the house and in the field; I will speak with you when you till the ground, when you thresh your corn, when you eat your bread." Every place is holy where a holy heart is found. This ought to gladden the solitude of godly men. God is with you, therefore be of good cheer. If you are on board ship, or if you are wandering in the woods, or are banished to the ends of the earth, or are shut out from the Sabbath assemblies of God's house, yet

> "Where'er you seek him he is found,
> And every place is hallowed ground."

On the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite did God meet with David, and in your workroom, at your bench, or upon your bed, or behind the hedge, or in the corner of a railway carriage, the Lord will hear you, and commune with you.

My heart rejoices when I think that this was not only a very unadorned place, and one that was given up to common uses, but it was also *in the possession of a Jebusite.* The Jebusites were among the nations doomed for their iniquities; they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise; and this vast rock on which the Temple is to stand, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, belongs at first to one of the accursed seed of Canaan. Herein the Lord showeth that he is no respecter of persons; he would meet the king, not on the land of an Israelite, but on the threshing-floor of a Jebusite. The Jews wrapped themselves up within themselves, and said, "The temple of the Lord; the temple of the Lord are we": but the Lord seemed to rebuke their national pride by saying, "And your Temple is built upon the threshing-floor of a Jebusite." If they would but have remembered this, the Jews might in our Lord's day have been more tolerant of the conversion of the Gentiles to God. Moreover, Gentile blood flowed in the veins of that very king who established their empire, and who was now prostrate before his God, interceding for Jerusalem. Remember Ruth, and whence she came. She put her trust under the wings of Jehovah, God of Israel, and became the great-grandmother of David. David never seemed to forget that fact, for his psalms are full of far-reaching desires and good wishes for all the peoples of the earth. Remember his words: "Let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." He looks back upon his birth, as the son of Jesse and the great-grandson of Ruth, and a large heart

beats within his breast, desiring that Jehovah may be the God of the whole earth. Let us, therefore, not consider our own peculiar nationality or condition, or rank among men, as if salvation came by natural descent. The blood of fallen Adam is in the veins of every man, and there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ Jesus. If you happen to have been born of parents who did not train you in the fear of God, yet do not despond; for as the Temple was built upon the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, so shall the great God dwell in your heart though your fathers knew him not. Say thou in thy soul, "The Lord shall have a dwelling within my heart, Jebusite though I be."

Once more, there was one matter in reference to Ornan's threshing-floor which it would be well to mention: before it could be used *it had to be bought with money.* I frequently meet with impossibly spiritual people who hate the mention of money in connection with the worship of God. The clatter of a collection jars upon their sublime feelings. The mention of money in connection with the worship of God is more dreadful to them than it is to God himself; for he saith, "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money"; and again, "None shall appear before me empty." To these pious persons money saved and hoarded is abundantly pleasant; their only objection is to giving it. In this they somewhat differ from David, who paid to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. Before he would offer a sacrifice he paid down fifty shekels of earnest money; for he said, "I will not offer burnt offerings unto Jehovah my God of that which doth cost me nothing." It is a very curious thing, is it not? that one man should show his spirituality by his liberality, and another should pretend to do it by the reverse method. In connection with all true worship of God in the olden times there was always the offertory, and frequently the sound of gold or silver. Beneath the drawn sword of the avenging angel money is given, and land is bought. The solemnity of the transaction is not marred thereby. Yet there was no absolute need for money, since Ornan said, "Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all." David cannot endure to worship at another man's expense, and he answers "Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price." That religion which costs a man nothing is usually worth nothing. Under the old dispensation, when men went up to worship God, it was with a bullock or with a lamb; even the poorest brought at least a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons. Do you think that this bringing of cattle and birds into the sanctuary would spoil your spirituality? It would do so if you have no spirituality; but if you have grace in your heart, your spirituality will choose just such a practical way in which to show itself. Some men's godliness is a thin, misty, ghostly, ghastly nothing: true adoration is a thing of substance, and of truth. The highest act of adoration that was ever paid on earth was when that woman, whose name is to be mentioned wherever this gospel is preached, emptied upon the head of our blessed Lord an alabaster box of precious nard. That gift was known to have cost her at least five hundred pence. It might have been sold for much, but the costliness of the perfume entered into the very essence of the act in the mind of the holy and grateful woman. The

Lord Jesus Christ when he sat over against the treasury not only read the hearts of the givers, but he noticed the actual offering of the woman who dropped into the box two mites that made a farthing, which were all her living. Some people would sneeringly allude to the two dirty half-farthings, and condemn the collection as spoiled by Alexander the coppersmith; but the Lord is not so dainty as his servants, for he accepts the poor gifts of his people. The rattle of the coins did not take away from the heavenliness and the spirituality of that woman's worship. Far otherwise. The top of Moriah, where God appoints that his Temple should be builded, saw the weighing out of gold and silver, and was all the fitter for Divine communion because thereof.

From the whole learn that it is not needful for meeting with God that you should be aided by persons arrayed in special robes, oxen will do as well; neither do you require a holy pavement, a threshing-floor may be holiness unto the Lord; neither do you need stained glass and vaulted roofs, the open air is better still. Do not believe for a moment that visible grandeur is necessary to the place where God will meet with you. Go to your threshing-floor and pray; ay, while the unmuzzled oxen take their rest, bow your knee and cry to the Lord of the harvest, and you shall meet with God there amongst the straw and the grain. Fear not to draw nigh to God in these streets, but consecrate all space to the Lord your God. Study simplicity and plainness of worship. Remember how the Lord hated altars of brick, and how he would have his people build an altar of earth or of unhewn stone, to keep his worship simple and natural. "If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it."

II. But now, secondly, SPIRITUALLY THIS THRESHING-FLOOR OF ORNAN WAS AN ADMIRABLE TYPE OF HOW GOD MEETS WITH MEN.

I think, first, *its extreme simplicity enters into the essence of the type.* So far from thinking that a threshing-floor was a bad place to pray in, if I look a little beneath the surface I think I can see the reason for it. Golden grain is being separated from the straw by the corn drag—whence came this corn? From him who openeth his hand and supplieth the want of every living thing. Here, then, God meets me in the kindest way. Where can I meet him better than where he gives me food? Where can we better adore than in the midst of his rich gifts by which he doth sustain my life? Why, I think if I had gone out to gather manna every morning with my omer, I should have kept on praising God every moment as I collected the heavenly bread. Never could spot be more propitious than where the gracious Preserver of men spread out needful food for his children. We cannot do better than praise God when we are in our daily service earning our daily bread, or gathered at our meals refreshing our bodies. At the gate of God's almonry let us wait with worship. Where better a temple out of which the bread of eternal life shall come, than on a threshing-floor where the bread of the first life is to be gathered? The two things seem to meet right well together. The temporal and the eternal join hands in common consecration. That same prayer which teaches us to say, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," leads us on to cry, "Give us day by day our daily bread." There is a spiritual significance in the type.

Would it be fanciful if with a glance I indicated that the *threshing-floor is the exact type of affliction?* Tribulation signifies threshing in the Latin, and the saints through much tribulation enter the kingdom. One of the titles of the people of God is "my threshing and the corn of my floor." Now it is well known that the Lord is with his people in their trials. When he smites with one hand he holds with the other. In the lion of trial we find the honey of communion. The temple of glory is built on the threshing-floor of affliction. I do not thrust forward this observation as though it were of great weight; but even if it be a fancy so far as the type is concerned, the thought conveys a truth in a pleasing manner.

But much more, *this was the place where justice was most clearly manifest.* Above Ornan's threshing floor, in mid-air, stood a dreadful apparition. A bright and terrible figure, a mysterious servant of God, was beheld with a drawn sword in his hand, which he brandished over the guilty city of Jerusalem. Deaths were constant. The people fell as forest leaves in autumn. Then was it that David went out to meet with his God, and make confession before him. Oh, sirs, the lack of many of you is that you have never yet beheld sin in its consequences, sin in its guilt, sin in its doom. God is angry with the sinner every day. Men do not fly to God till fear puts wings upon their feet. Take away the dread of the wrath to come, and you have removed the great impulse which makes men seek for mercy. Men will not meet God till they see the angel with the drawn sword. They will trifle and play with sin, and neglect the invitation of God, and even doubt his existence, till conviction comes home to them, and they are made to feel that sin is an exceeding evil and bitter thing. Conviction of sin wrought by the Spirit of God is more powerful than argument. I had religiousness, but I never drew near to God in spirit and in truth till I had seen and almost felt that drawn sword. To feel that God must punish sin, that God will by no means clear the guilty, is the best thing to drive a man Godward. To feel that sword as it were with its point at your own breast, its edge ready to descend upon your own being, this it is that makes the guilty plead for pardon in real earnest. Men cry not "Lord save" till they are forced to add "or I perish." I could wish for certain preachers that I hear of, that they were made more vividly to realize the terror of the Lord in their own souls. He who has felt the hot drops of despair scald his throat, has had it cleared for the utterance of free grace doctrine. If some men had more fully felt that they were sinners, they would have made better saints. David meets with God at the place where he sees that sin necessitates condign punishment, and I do not believe that any man can be in fellowship with God and be blind to that truth. David saw the result of his own sin, and dreaded what would further come if, day after day, the Lord should visit him and his people with judgment. He had grown proud of the number of his subjects, and had begun to act the independent potentate, instead of loyally remaining the viceroy of Jehovah; but now he sees that he has been guilty of high treason, and beholds the sword at his neck. There he bows himself, and there the God of all grace meets with him.

Perhaps the point which brought David out into complete brokenness of heart was a clear view of the deadly effect of his sin upon others.

Seventy thousand people had died of the black death already through his sin, and still the pestilence raged: this brought the matter home to his heart. Every ungodly man ought to reflect upon the mischief which he has caused to others by his evil life: his wife has been hindered from good things, his children have grown up without the fear of God, his companions with whom he has worked and traded are hardened in their wickedness by a sight of his wickedness: youthful minds have been seduced from virtue by his vice, simple hearts have been led into infidelity by his unbelief. O men, you know not what you do. You let fly sparks, but what the conflagration may have already been none of you can tell. Carelessly, O man, hast thou cast the thistledown to the wind; but what harvests of the ill weed have come, and may yet come, from thy single handful, who can tell? Are there not some in hell through thine influence? Are not others going there through thine unhallowed teaching? O thou whose hair is snow-white with sixty or seventy winters, how much of ruin hast thou wrought already! How much more is still to come! This came home to David, and he stood aghast at it, crying to God about it, and pleading as for his life that the evil might be stayed.

Thus, you see, when the deadly fruit of sin is clearly perceived, then the soul turns to God, and the Lord meets that soul. The cross is the place of doom: under its shadow we admit our guilt, and vividly see it, and thus put ourselves into a truthful position, where the God of truth will meet with us. God will meet with sinners when they come to him as sinners; but he will not hearken to them while they refuse to see their sin, and will not believe in the vengeance due to it.

Furthermore, that place where God met with David and made it to be his temple for ever, was the place *where sin was confessed.* David's confession is very frank and full. David says, "Is it not I? Even I it is that have sinned." Go thou, sinner, to the Lord with thine own personal confession. Shut thine eye to thy fellow-man, and say, "Father, I have sinned." Cry with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Make private personal confession, without comparing thyself with thy fellow-men, and the Lord has promised to forgive thee, and all those who confess their transgressions.

Set forth in thy confession the aggravated nature of thy sin. David said, "I it is that have sinned and done evil *indeed.*" He emphasizes the evil, "I have done evil *indeed.*" You will not find God in a way of grace till you begin to put an "indeed" at the end of the evil which you confess. Have you not sinned against light, sinned against knowledge, sinned against love, sinned against warnings, sinned against entreaties? Then, go and tell the Lord that you have sinned with grievous aggravations. "Father," said the prodigal, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Where such a confession as this is offered, God will meet the sinner.

That confession also had within itself an admission of the justice of the punishment; for he says, "Let thine hand be on me, and on my father's house." He does not cavil against the sword of the Lord and its deadly blows. That sinner truly repents who feels—

"My lips, with shame, my sins confess
Against thy law, against thy grace:
Lord, should thy judgment grow severe,
I am condemn'd, but thou art clear.

"Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce thee just in death;
And, if my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well."

That repentance which questions the justice of God in the punishment of sin is a repentance that needs to be repented of; but when the penitent doth, as it were, lay his head upon the block, yield his neck to the rope, and give himself up to God, saying, "I have sinned," then mercy feels free to display itself. As long as a man quarrels with justice he cannot be at peace with mercy. We must accept God as king, even though he beareth not the sword in vain, or else he will never put up that sword into its sheath. Condemn thyself, and God will acquit thee. Come penitently and submissively, and the just God will be a Saviour unto thee.

But this is only the beginning of it; for Ornan's threshing-floor was then the place *where sacrifice was offered and accepted.* Hastily they piled the altar of unhewn stones; they brought up to it ox after ox that had been lately threshing out the corn: the blood flowed in plentiful streams, and the sacrifice was laid upon the wood. God meets with men not where the blood of bulls and of goats flows in rivers, but where the glorious person of his own dear incarnate Son is offered up once for all for guilty men. Calvary is the trysting-place between God and penitents. Now we have reached it. This is the site of the temple: this is the temple "not made with hands," once destroyed, but builded up in three days. The person of the Lord Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead, is that place where God meeteth guilty, confessing man, and striketh hands with him; ay, eats and drinks with him in peace, as was indicated by the peace offering which David presented, and the Lord accepted. Oh, souls, you need to see this, for if you do not see it you will never see God. A reconciled God is only to be seen through the smoke of the great sacrifice. The wounds of Christ are the windows of the heart of God. If thou canst believe in Jesus Christ, by faith presenting him again to God as thy sacrifice, then God will meet with thee.

But what did David see ere long when he had laid his bullock on the altar? A flame descended from the Lord. Like a flash of lightning it came, and the sacrifice was consumed; sure token that the Lord had accepted it, and was well pleased because of it. Even thus has the Lord accepted the one great sacrifice for sin. When our Lord Jesus offered himself he came under the judicial sentence, and cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was consumed with sorrow. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him." The Lord himself put him to grief, and made his soul a sacrifice for sin. "He was made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." And now the Lord has placed his mercy-seat where the blood is sprinkled. He accepts us in the Beloved whose sacrifice he accepted long ago when he raised him from the dead. We have access by the blood of Jesus.

Come, poor trembling sinner; come with thine eye on Jesus crucified and thou shalt be welcomed of the Lord.

As soon as David had seen the sacrifice he had only one more sight to see, and that made the threshing-floor of Ornan more glorious than ever. *He beheld the sign of peace.* Above the threshing-floor stood the angel of the Lord; but what a change! The drawn sword, which threatened death to the city and to the nation, was suddenly thrust into its scabbard, and all was still. Not a soul more in Jerusalem should die of the pestilence. The sword of the Lord rested and was quiet. Oh, the joy of David's spirit when he saw this! What a solemn but joyous melting of heart he felt as his soul gushed forth in streams of gratitude. Learn from this that the point of full communion with God to-day is the place where we see the angel with the sheathed sword. Oh, how sweet to know that God hath nothing against us! He hath blotted out our transgressions, and will never remember them. He cannot smite us, for he has justified us in his Son. How shall he destroy those for whom Christ hath shed his blood? He hath a sword, but it is for those who are the adversaries of our souls, even for the archfiend who would destroy us. Its edge is not for us who are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus. Many of you cannot draw near to God, and I do not wonder at it, because you have not yet seen that sin was in very deed put away by the sacrifice of Jesus. You have seen the drawn sword, and that is something; but you have not yet beheld that sword sheathed, nor heard the voice of Jehovah saying, "It is enough." The place where love meets love, where your little tiny stream melts into the great river of God's love, is where we sing, "O Lord, I will praise thee; for though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." Henceforth our life flows with the life of Jesus in one deep, peaceful stream, onward and onward for ever. You cannot rest in the Lord and live in him till you have seen the Sacrifice and its eternal results in peace with God. May God bring you there! Atonement is the basis of worship. The sacrifice of Christ and his righteousness, these are the Jachin and the Boaz, the two sublime pillars of the temple gate. God communes with men where Jesus becomes man's rest. You cannot pass to the mercy-seat to speak with God except through the veil of the Saviour's body which was rent on our behalf.

Thus I think I have made you familiar with the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, and showed you wherein it was felt to be a place of divine manifestation and a fit site for the permanent temple of God.

III. And now I am going to close by HEARTILY EXHORTING YOU TO USE THIS PLACE. Brethren and sisters, if we have found out where to meet with God, then let us meet with him continually. Do you feel guilty this morning? Is your sin heavy upon you? Do you see the sworded angel? Well, you have to meet God even there! Therefore, gird up your loins! "What garments shall I put on?" Put on sackcloth. I mean not literally; but while there is any guilt upon you come to God with lowliest penitence, mourning for sin, as David did, and the elders that were with him. You may not come now in the silken garments of your luxury, nor in the purple robes of your pride, nor in the mail of your hate. Put these away from you, and come with sackcloth and ashes, weeping for your transgressions, and God will meet

with you; for he will meet with sinners who come to him mourning because of their sin.

When you thus come, I want you to be quiet a while. Stand still! Listen! Suppose you had been with those elders of Israel; what would you have heard? You would have heard your shepherd-king pleading for his flock: "These sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand be on me, and on my father's house." But now David is dead and buried, and his sepulchre is in his own land; but another King of the house of David, one Jesus, is standing before the Lord pleading for mercy. While you are clothed in the sackcloth of your repentance, you may hear him cry, "As for these sheep, let them live. Thou hast awakened the sword against me, their shepherd, therefore let my sheep be spared! Thine hand has been on me, therefore let these go their way!" Do you hear that intercession? Jesus is pleading in that fashion now. He is "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Oh it is blessed to come to God that way—with the sackcloth on your loins, but with the prevalent intercession in your ears; confidently believing that Jesus maketh intercession for the transgressors, and that he must and will so prevail that by his knowledge he shall justify many.

Further, when you are coming to God, dear hearts, always take care that you come to the sacrifice. We frequently miss communion with God, I am persuaded, because we do not remember enough that precious blood which gives us access to God. When you go up-stairs to pray, and you cannot get near to God, then do not speak, but sit in silence, and muse upon the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion of the Lord, and all the circumstances of his wondrous death, and say, "He loved me and gave himself for me." There is a matchless power in the Lord's sacrifice to remove the stone out of the heart, and pluck away selfishness from the affections. Come, come, come, come to the sacrifice! There shall you dwell with God in sweet delight.

If you would come still nearer to God, do not forget the effect of the sacrifice and intercession in the sheathing of the sword of justice. I have already set forth this truth; now I entreat you to turn it to practical use by enjoying it.

> "Oh how sweet to view the flowing
> Of my Saviour's precious blood,
> With divine assurance knowing
> He has made my peace with God."

Do not say, "I hope that the sword is sheathed"; it either is so, or it is not so. Do not be content with questionable hopes, but aim at certainties. Rest not till you obtain a solid assurance of your peace with God. If Jesus Christ was punished for your sin you cannot be punished for it; if he did bear your sin he did bear it, and there is an end of it; and if you have believed on him you have the full proof in the word of God that you are justified before God. What more do you want than God's own word for it? and that word declares that you, as a believer, have eternal life and shall never perish, neither shall you come into condemnation. Do not continue to mutter, "Well, I hope I may yet realise it." Why these debates? It is so: "he that believeth in him is

justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses": God has turned away his wrath from the believer, and the sword is sheathed; therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And lastly, if this be so, and you realise it, go away and begin to build a temple. You say, "Do you want us to build a new place of worship?" No, I speak only of a spiritual house. Of course, build as many meeting-places as you can where people may come together to hear the word, for many are needed in this growing city, but the peculiar sort of building which I urge upon you is of the heart and spirit. Make your entire being a living temple for the living God. Begin now: the foundations are laid, you would not dream of building on any other; for "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid." The Divine Moriah of Christ's person, the sacred place of his sacrifice is the mount wherein God shall be seen. Jesus Christ has himself become the foundation of your hope; go and build on him. Set up the pillars of earnest supplication, and arch them over with lofty praises. Remember, your God "inhabiteth the praises of Israel." Build him a house of praise, that he may dwell in you, make your bodies to be the temples of the Holy Ghost, and your spirits the priests that sacrifice therein. In acts of holiness, piety, charity, and love spend all your days. Let your houses be churches dedicated to his fear and love; and let their chambers be holy as the courts of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Let each morning and evening have its sacrifice. Be yourself a priest at the altar. Let the garments of your daily toil be as vestments, your meals as sacraments; let your thoughts be psalms, your prayers incense, and your breath praise. Let every action be a priestly function, bringing glory unto the Lord from this day forth and for ever. He that died for you reckons you to be dead to all things but himself; and so it becometh you to be. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price," and from this day forward your motto should be,—"Thine entirely. Thine entirely, O my God, I am." Begin to build this living temple, and the Lord help you to complete it to his praise. A poor edifice it will be when you have finished it, compared with the Lord your God; but yet if you have laboured sincerely and earnestly it will turn out to be compacted of gold and silver and precious stones, and it will be found in the day of Christ to honour and glory. So may the Lord bless you, beloved, now and for ever. Amen, and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Chronicles xxi.; xxii. 1—5.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—302, 553, 551.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

MAY I?

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 6TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"If I may."—Matthew ix. 21.

THE woman in the narrative was fully persuaded that if she did but touch our Lord's garment she would be made whole. What she had heard and seen concerning Jesus made her sure of his superabundant power to heal the sick. A touch would do it. Yea, even a touch of his clothes. Her one and only question was, might she touch him? Could she touch him? She would surely be healed if she could touch; but was this allowable? Was this possible? I know that multitudes of sin-sick men and women are vexed with this same question. Oh that I could help them over the difficulty! May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, aid me!

This poor diseased woman did not utter this "if" of hers with her lips. Perhaps if she had it might not have troubled her so much; for a silent doubt usually eats right into the heart. You have heard of the Spartan boy who had hidden a fox in his bosom, and allowed it to eat into his vitals before he would own to it. Beware of having a doubt hidden away in your heart, gnawing and tearing. If you are even now suffering from "If I may, if I may," reveal the trouble to some tender Christian friend and you may soon escape from it.

But the sufferer now before us had the courage to put the question to a practical issue; she tried whether she might or not. She had the good sense, the grace-given wisdom, not to wait until she had solved that question in her mind, but she went and solved it, as a matter of fact, whether she might or not: she went and actually touched the hem of the garment of the Saviour, and she was made perfectly whole. Oh that those I am now addressing would have the bravery and the earnestness to do the same! Oh that they would put the disturbing question to a practical test at once! There can be but one result; for as many as touched him were made perfectly whole. Now, I know that souls are going to be saved to-night. Who they are I cannot tell; but some are certain to come to the Saviour, and this night to be made perfectly whole. I know it because we prayed an hour ago for it down-stairs, many of us, and we felt the assurance that we were heard. My dear

son, in praying just now, I am sure felt a very remarkable liberty at the mercy-seat, and the witness of the Spirit within that he was heard. The Lord has heard the petitions which we have presented in the name of Jesus. You are going to be saved. I would to God that every unconverted person here would lean forward and say, "May it be *I*. God grant that salvation may come to *me*." I am going, therefore, in the simplest way possible, without any attempt at a sermon, to try to talk so as to meet this rankling question which lies within, festering and irritating many an earnest heart—this doubtful enquiry, "If I may."

You know, many of you, who Jesus is, and you believe him to be the Son of God, the Saviour of men. You are sure that "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." You have no doubt about those eternal verities which surround his Godhead, his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, and his Second Advent. The doubt is concerning yourself personally,—"If I may be a partaker of this salvation." You feel quite certain that faith in Jesus Christ will save any one,—will save you if you exercise it. You have no doubt about the doctrine of justification by faith. You have learned it, and you have received it as a matter beyond all dispute, that he that believeth in him hath everlasting life; and you know that him that cometh to him he will in nowise cast out. You know the remedy, and believe in its efficacy; but then comes the doubt,—may I be healed by it? At the back of your belief in faith hides the gloomy thought, "May I believe? May I trust? I see the door is open: many are entering. May I? I see that there is washing from the worst of sins in the sacred fount. Many are being cleansed. May I wash and be clean?" Without formulating a doubt so as to express it, it comes up in all sorts of ways, and robs you of all comfort, and, indeed, of all hope. When a sermon is preached it is like as when one sets a table out with all manner of dainties, and you look at it, but do not feel that you have any right to sit down and partake. This is a wretched delusion. Its result will be deadly unless you are delivered from it. Like a harpy it preys upon you, croaking evermore. When you see the brooks flowing with their sparkling streams, and you are thirsty, does there arise the thought in your heart that you are not permitted to drink? If so, you are out of your mind; you talk and think like one bereft of reason. Yet many are in this state spiritually. This doubting your liberty to come to Jesus is a very wretched business; it mars and spoils your reading and your hearing and your attempts to pray; and you will never get any comfort until this question has been answered in your heart once for all,—"May I?"

Our Authorized Version may not be exactly correct in this passage; but I do not care whether it is or not, so far as my address is concerned; for it does not depend upon the accuracy of a text. I am quite satisfied to preach from it to-night; but there is another translation in the Revised Version, which I dare say is more accurate. I will preach from that when I have done with the first. This shall be our subject,—"If I may"; or first, "*if I may be allowed;*" secondly, "*if I may be enabled;*" thirdly, "*if I actually do.*" This last is the Revised Version: "*If I do* but touch the hem of his garment I shall be made whole."

I. First, take it as we have got it here: "IF I MAY BE ALLOWED,

or permitted, to touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole." That is your difficulty, is it?—whether you have liberty and warrant to come and trust Christ—whether you, such a sinner as you are, are permitted to repose your soul upon his great atonement and his finished work. Let me reason with you a little.

In the first place, you are quite sure of this—that *there is nothing to forbid your coming and resting your guilty soul upon Christ.* I shall defy you, if you will read all the Old and New Testament through, to put your finger upon a single verse in which God has said that you may not come and put your trust in Christ. Perhaps you will reply that you do not expect to read it in the Bible, but God may have said it somewhere where it is not recorded. Well, I answer you there; for he says, "I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain." Now, he has bidden you over and over again to seek his face, but he has never said that you shall seek his face in vain. Dismiss that thought. Again I return to what I have said: there is nothing in the Scripture that refuses you permission to come and repose your soul once for all upon Christ. It is written, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Does that exclude you? It is written, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Does that shut you out? No, it includes you; it invites you; it encourages you. And I come again to what I have said—that nowhere in the word of God is it written that you will be cast out if you come, or that Jesus Christ will not remove your burden of sin if you come and lay it at his feet.

Ah, no; a thousand passages of Scripture welcome you, but not one stands with a drawn sword to keep you back from the tree of life. Our heavenly Father sets his angels at the gates of his house to welcome all comers; but there are no dogs to bark at poor beggars, nor so much as a notice that trespassers must beware. Come and welcome. There is none to say you nay.

Further, do you not think that *the very nature of the Lord Jesus Christ should forbid your raising a doubt about your being permitted to come and touch his garment's hem?* Surely, if any one were to paint the Lord Jesus Christ as an ascetic, repelling with lofty pride the humbler folk who had never reached his dignity of consecration—if any were to paint him as a Pharisee driving off publicans and sinners, or as an iceberg of righteousness chilling the sinful, it would be a foul slander upon his divine character. If any one were to say that Jesus Christ is exacting—that he will not receive to himself the guilty just as they are, but requires a great deal of them, and will only welcome to himself those who are, like himself, good, and true, and excellent, that would not be truth but the direct opposite of it; for, "this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them," was thrown in his face when he lived here below; and what the prophet said of him was most certainly true, if anything was ever true. "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." Little children are wonderful judges of character; they know intuitively who is kind. And so are loving women. They do not go through the processes of reasoning, but they come to a conclusion very soon as to a man's personal character. Now, the children came and clambered our Redeemer's knee, and the mothers brought

their infants for his blessing. How can you dream that he will repel *you?* The women wept and bewailed him; whoever might refuse him they pitied him, and therefore I am sure that he is not hard to move. Therefore I want you to feel sure of this—that there is nothing in the Saviour's character which can for a moment lead him to discard you and to drive you from his presence. Those who know him best will say that it is impossible for him ever to refuse the poor and needy. Not a blind man could cry to him without receiving sight, nor a hungry man look to him without being fed. He was touched with a feeling of our infirmities—the most gentle, and loving, and tender of all that ever dwelt upon this earth. I pray you, then, take it for granted that you may come boldly to him without fear of a rebuff. If he has power to heal you when you touch him, rest assured that you may touch him. You may believe; there is no question; for Jesus is too loving to refuse you. It will give the Lord Jesus joy to receive you. It is not possible that he should say you nay: it is not in his nature to spurn you from his presence.

Will you think, yet again, of *the fulness of Christ's power to save*, and make a little argument of it. Christ was so full of power to bless that the secret virtue even saturated his clothes. It overflowed his blessed person; it ran down to the skirts of his garments; ay, and it went to that blue hem which every Jew wore round about his dress—that fringe of blue. It went into that border so that if the woman did but touch the ravellings of his garment, virtue would stream into her. If the touch was a touch of faith it mattered not where the contact was made. Well now, you often judge of a man's willingness to help by the power that he has. When a person has little to give he is bound to be economical in his giving. He must look at every penny before he gives it, if he has so few pence to spare. But when a nobleman has no limit to his estate you feel sure that he will freely give if his heart be generous and tender. The blessed Lord is so full of healing power that he cannot need to stint himself as to the miracles of healing he shall work; and he must be, according to the goodness of his nature, delighted to overflow, glad to communicate to those who come. You know if a city is straitened for water the corporation will send out an order that only so much may be used, and there is a stinting of public baths, and factories, because there is a scarcity of the precious fluid. But if you go along the Thames when we have had a rainy season, you laugh at the notion of a short supply and economical rules. If a dog wants to drink from a river, nobody ever questions his right to do so. He comes down to the water and he laps, and, what is more, he runs right into it, regardless of those who may have to drink after him. Look at the cattle, how they stand knee-deep in the stream and drink, and drink again; and nobody ever says, as he goes up the Thames, that those poor London people will run short of water, for the dogs and the cattle are drinking it up before it gets down to London. No, it never enters our head to petition the Conservators to restrain the dogs and the cows; for there is so much water that there must be full liberty to everyone to drink to the full. Your question is, "May I? May I?" I answer that question by this: there is nothing to forbid you; there is everything in the nature of Christ to encourage you; and there is such

a fulness of mercy in him that you cannot think that he can have the slightest motive for withholding his infinite grace.

Moreover, suppose you come to Christ as this woman came, and touch the hem of his garment, *you will not injure him.* You ought to hesitate in getting good to yourself if you would injure the person through whom you obtain that good. But you will not injure the Lord Jesus Christ. He perceived that virtue had gone out of him, but he did not perceive it by any pain he felt: for rather do I believe that he perceived it by the pleasure which it caused him. Something gave him unusual joy. A faith-touch had reached him through his clothes, and he rejoiced to respond by imparting healing virtue from himself. You will not defile my Lord, O sinner, if you bring him all your sin. He will not have to die again to put away your fresh burden of transgression. He will not have to shed one drop of blood to make atonement for your multiplied sin: the one sacrifice on Calvary anticipated all possible guiltiness. If you will come just as you are, he will not have to leave heaven again, and be born again on earth, and live another sorrowful life in order to save you. He will not need to wear another crown of thorns, or bear another wound in his hands, or feet, or side. He has done all his atoning work: do you not remember his victorious cry—"It is finished"? You cannot injure him though all your injurious thoughts, and words, and speeches be laid upon him. You will not be robbing him of anything though your faith-touch should convey a life into yourself. He has such a fulness about him that if all you poor sinners will come at once, when you have taken away all of merit that you need, there will be as much merit left as there was before. When you deal with the infinite you may divide and subtract, but you cannot diminish. If the whole race were washed in the infinite fountain of Jesus' merit, the infinite would still remain.

Let me tell you that if you come to Jesus and just trust him to-night—only trust him—*you shall rather benefit him than injure him;* for it is his heart's joy to forgive sinners. He longs and thirsts to heal wounded consciences. My Lord is hungering, even now that he is in heaven, to bring poor sinners to his Father's feet, and reconcile them unto him; so that you will bless him, you will increase his joy, if you will return to the great Father whose house you have left. You will delight his heart as again he finds the lost piece of money, bears back the lost sheep, and welcomes home the returning prodigal. I think you need not keep on saying "If I may"; for these cheering reasons ought to convince you that you are fully warranted to trust in him whom God has set forth to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins.

Might not this also help you? *Others just like you have ventured to him, and there has not been a case in which they have been refused.* I thought, like you, when I was a child, that the gospel was a very wonderful thing, and free to everybody but myself. I should not have wondered at all if my brother and sisters as well as my father and mother had been saved; but, somehow, I could not get a hold of it myself. It was a precious thing, quite as much out of my reach as the Queen's diamonds. So I thought. To many the gospel is like a tram-car in motion, and they cannot jump upon it. I thought surely everybody

would be saved, but I should not; and yet, soon after I began to cry for mercy I found it. My expectations of difficulty were all sweetly disappointed. I believed and found immediate rest unto my soul. When I once understood that there was life in a look at the crucified One, I gave that look, and I found eternal life. Hitherto I have never met with anybody who did give that look and was repulsed; but they all say,

> "I came to Jesus as I was,
> Weary and worn and sad;
> I found in him a resting-place,
> And he has made me glad."

Nobody ever bears a contrary witness. I challenge the universe to produce a man who was chased from Christ's door, or forbidden to find in him a Saviour. I pray you, therefore, observe that, since others have come this way to life and peace, God has appointed it to be the common thoroughfare of grace. Poor guilty sinners, there is a mark set up, "This way for sinners. This way for the guilty. This way for the hungry. This way for the thirsty. This way for the lost. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Why, surely, you need not say, "If I may."

And why do you think—and that is one more question I would put to you—*why do you think that the Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy has led you here to-night?* "Oh, I always come," says one. Then what has induced you always to come where Christ is talked about so much, and where he saves so many? Surely the Lord means to accept you if you will believe on Jesus! "But I do not come here usually," says one; "I only stepped in here to-night, I am afraid, out of curiosity." Yes, curiosity moved you; but may it not be that compassion moved God to guide you here? I like to hear a wife say, "My husband is not a member of the church, sir, but he comes to hear the gospel, and therefore I have hope of him." Ay, yes; if we get them into the battle a shot will come their way one of these days. I love to see yon hungry sparrows round about the window; they will get courage enough to pick up a crumb of mercy one of these days. I hope so. And why should it not be *now?* If the trouble is "If I may," I will ask you whether it does not help to remove that trouble to reflect that you are still on praying ground and pleading terms with God. You might long ere this have been cast into despair. Should not the Lord's long-suffering lead you to repentance, and induce you to come to Christ?

Now listen, friend: there is no room to say "If I may," for, first of all, *you are invited* to come and accept Christ as your Saviour—invited over and over again in the Word of God. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Jesus Christ invites all those that labour and are heavy laden to come unto him, and he will give them rest. God is honest in his invitations. Be you sure of that. If God invites you, he desires you to come and accept the invitation. After reading the many invitations of the Word of God to such as you

are, you may not say "If I may." It will be a wicked questioning of the sincerity of God.

In addition to being invited, *you are entreated.* Many passages of Scripture go far beyond a mere invitation. God persuades and entreats you to come to him. He seems to cry as one that weeps, "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Our Lord and Master when he made the feast, and they that were bidden did not come, sent out his servants to compel them to come in. He used more than a bare invitation, he put forth a divine compulsion. I would entreat, persuade, exhort all of you who have not believed in Jesus to do so now. In the name of Jesus, I beseech you seek the Lord. I do not merely put it to you, "Will you or will you not?" but I would lay my whole heart by the side of the request and say to you, "Come to Jesus. Come and rest your guilty souls on him." Do you not understand the gospel message? Do you know what it asks and what it gives? You shall receive perfect pardon in a moment if you believe in Jesus. You shall receive a life that will never die—receive it now, quick as a lightning flash, if you do but trust in the Son of God. Whoever you may be, and whatever you may have done, if you will with your heart believe in him whom God has raised from the dead, and obey him henceforth as your Lord and Saviour, all manner of sin and of iniquity shall be forgiven unto you. God will blot out your iniquities like a cloud. He will make you begin *de novo*—afresh, anew. A new creature in Christ Jesus will he make you. Old things shall pass away and all things become new.

But there is the point—believing in Jesus; and you look me in the face and cry, "But may I?" May you? Why, you are exhorted, invited, entreated so to do. Nor is this all. *You are even commanded to do it.* This is the commandment—that ye believe on Jesus, whom he has sent. This is the gospel, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." There is a command, with a threatening for disobedience. Shall anybody say "May I" after that? If I read, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," do I say, "May I love God?" If I read, "Honour thy father and thy mother," do I say, "May I honour my father and my mother?" No. A command is a permit and something more. It gives full allowance and much more. As thou wilt be damned if thou believest not, thou hast herein given thee a right to believe—not only a permission, but a warrant of the most practical kind. Oh, can you not see it? Will you not cry unto God, "Lord, if thou wilt damn me if I do not believe, thou hast in this given me a full gospel liberty to believe. Therefore I come and put my trust in Jesus."

"If I may"—why, I think that this questioning ought to come to an end now. Will you not give it up? May the Holy Ghost show thee, poor sinner, that thou mayest now lay thy burden down at Jesus' feet, and be at once saved. Thou mayest believe. Thou hast full permission now to confess thy sin and to receive immediate pardon: see if it be not so. Cast thy guilty soul on him, and rise forgiven and renewed, henceforth to live in fervent gratitude, a miracle of love.

That is the first meaning of the text: "If I may be permitted to touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole."

II. But then there arises in other hearts this equally bitter question, "BUT CAN I? I know that I may if I can; but I cannot." This woman, seeing the press, might have said, "If I can touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole; but can I get at him? Can a feeble person like myself force my way through the throng and touch him?"

Now, that is the question I am going to answer. The will to believe in Christ is as much a work of grace as faith itself, and where the will is given and a strong desire, a measure of grace is already received, and with it the power to believe. Do you not know that the will to commit adultery is, according to Scripture, reckoned as adultery? "He hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Now, if the very thought of uncleanness and the will towards it is the thing itself, then a desire or will to believe contains within itself the major part of faith. I say not that it is all, but I do say this—that if the power of God has made a man will to believe, the greater work has been done, and his actually believing will follow in due course. That entire willingness to believe is nine-tenths of believing. Inasmuch as to will is present with you, the power which you find not as yet will certainly come to you. The man is dead, and the hardest thing is to make him live; but in the case before us the quickening is accomplished, for the man lives so far as to will: he wills to believe, he yearns to believe, he longs to believe: how much has been done for him! Rising from the dead is a greater thing than the performance of an act of life. Already I see some breathings of life in you who are longing and yearning to lay hold on Christ. You shall yet lay hold on him, and live in his presence. I would have said to that woman, had I been there and known then what I know now, "Oh, woman, that faith of yours, that if you can but touch the hem of his garment you will be made whole, is a greater thing than the actual touch can be. It is not at present so operative, but it is a more singular product of grace. You have within you already the greater work of grace, and the less will follow. A thousand persons could press through the crowd and touch the hem of the Saviour's robe, but you are the only person in whom God has wrought the faith that a touch will make you whole. I might say of such a faith as that, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee'; and if thou art in that condition, there is a very great work done in thee already, and thou needest not doubt the possibility of thy touching the sacred vesture."

But mark this, faith in Christ is the simplest action that anybody ever performs. It is the action of a child; indeed, it is the action of a new-born babe in grace. A new-born babe never performs an action that is very complicated. We say, "Oh, it is such a babyish thing," meaning thereby that it is so small. Now, faith comes at the moment that the child is born into God's family; it is coeval with the new birth. One of the first signs and tokens of being born again is faith; therefore it must be a very, very simple thing. I venture to put it very plainly when I say that faith in Christ differeth in no respect from faith in anybody else, except as to the person upon whom that faith is set. Thou believest in

thy mother: thou mayest in the same manner believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thou believest in thy friend: it is the same act that thou hast to do toward thy higher and better friend. Thou believest the news that is commonly reported and printed in the daily journals: it is the same act which believes the Scripture, and the promise of God.

The reason why faith in the Lord Jesus is a superior act to faith in any one else lies in this fact—that it is a superior person whom thou believest in, and superior news that thou dost believe; and thy natural heart is more averse to believing in Jesus than to believing in any one else. The Holy Spirit must teach thy faith to grasp the high things of Christ Jesus; but that grasp is by the hand of a simple child-like faith. But it is the same faith; mark thou that. It is the gift of God in so far as this—that God gives thee the understanding and the judgment to exercise it upon his Son, and to receive him. The faith of a child in his father is almost always a wonderful faith; just the faith that we would ask for our Lord Jesus. Many children believe that there is no other man in the world so great and good, and right and kind and rich, and everything else as their father is; and if anybody were to say that their father was not as wonderful a man as Mr. Gladstone, or some other great statesman, they would become quite grieved; for if their father is not king, it is a mistake that he is not. Children think so of their parents, and that is the kind of faith we would have you exercise towards the Lord Jesus Christ, who deserves such confidence, and much more. We should give to Jesus a faith by which we do him honour and magnify him exceedingly. As the child never thinks where the bread and butter is to come from to-morrow morning, and it never enters its little head to fret about where it will get new socks when the present ones are worn out, so must you trust in Jesus Christ for everything you want between here and heaven—trust him without asking questions. He can and will provide. Just give yourself up to him entirely, as a child gives itself up to a parent's care, and feels itself to be at ease. Oh, what a simple act it is!—this act of faith. I am sure that it must be a very simple act, and cannot require wisdom, and so forth, because I notice that it is the wise people that cannot do it: it is the strong people that cannot do it: it is the people who are righteous in themselves that cannot reach it. Faith is a kind of act which is performed by those who are childlike in heart, whom the world calls fools, and ridicules and persecutes for their folly. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the weak things of the world and base things, and things which are despised hath God chosen." There are persons with no education whatever, who just know their Bibles true, and have an abundant faith: they are poor in this world, but rich in faith. Happy people! Alas, for those wise people whose wisdom prevents faith in Jesus! They have been to more than one university, and have earned all the degrees that carnal wisdom can bestow upon them, and yet they cannot believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Oh, friend, do not think that faith is some difficult and puzzling thing, for then these senior wranglers and doctors of divinity would have it. It is the simplest act that the mind can perform. Just as I lean now with all my weight on this rail, and if it breaks I fall; so lean thou thy full weight on Jesus Christ, and that is faith. Just as a babe lies in its

mother's bosom, unconscious of the thunderstorm, or of the rocking of the ship, quite safe and happy because it rests in the bosom of love; all fear and care laid aside because of that true heart which beats beneath: even so do thou just cast thyself altogether upon Christ, and that is all that thou hast to do—just, in fact, to leave off doing.

"Cast thy deadly doing down,
Down at Jesu's feet.
Stand in him, in him alone,
Gloriously complete."

"But shall I not have to do many good works?" says one. You shall do as much as ever you like when you are once saved; but in this matter of your salvation you must fling all self-righteousness away as so much devilry that will ruin and injure you, and come simply to Christ, and Christ alone, and trust in him.

"Oh," says one, "I think I see a little light. If I am enabled,—if I do but get power enough to trust in Jesus, I shall be made whole." I will ask thee another question. Dost thou not know that *thou art bound to believe in Christ*—that it is due to Christ that he be believed in? I would not make extensive claims upon your faith for myself. Often have I said to friends who have told me that they could not believe in Christ, "Could you believe in *me?* If I were to tell you that I would do such and such things, would you believe it?" "Oh yes, sir." "If anyone were to say that he did not believe what I said, how would you feel?" "I should feel very indignant, for I feel that I can trust you; indeed I cannot help trusting you." When I receive such confidence from one of my fellow-creatures, I feel that it is cruelly wrong for the same person to say, "I cannot trust Christ." Oh, beloved, not believe Jesus! When did he lie? "Oh, but I cannot trust him." Not trust him? What madness is this! And did he die in very truth? Did he seal his life's witness with his heart's blood; and can you not believe him? My own conviction is that a great many of you can, and that already, to a large extent, you do; only you are looking for signs and wonders which will never come. Why not exert that power a little farther? The Spirit of God has given to you a measure of faith; oh, believe more fully, more unreservedly. Why, I know that you shivered just now at the very thought of doubting Christ. You felt how unjust and wrong it was; there is latent in you already a faith in him. "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar." Would you make Christ a liar? Dear hearts, I know that you would not. Although you say that you dare not trust him, yet you know that he is no liar, and you know that he is able to save you. What a strange state your mind has reached. How bewildered and befogged you are; for already I think, as a looker-on, I can see that there is within your soul a real faith in Jesus Christ; and yet what doubts distract you. Why not bring faith to the front? and say, "I do believe, I will believe, that the Christ who is the Son of the Highest, and who died for the guilt of men, is able to save those that trust him, and therefore I trust him to save me. Sink or swim I trust him. Lost or saved I will trust him. Just as I am, with no other plea but that I am sure that he is able and willing to save, I cast my guilty soul on him." You have the power to trust Jesus when you have already yielded to the conviction that he

is worthy to be trusted. You have but to push to its practical conclusion what God the Holy Ghost has already wrought in many of you, and you will at once find peace.

Still, if you think that there is something that prevents your having faith in Christ, though you know that if you had it you would be saved, I do earnestly entreat you not to stay contentedly for a single hour without a full, complete, and saving faith in Christ; for if you die unbelievers you are lost, and lost for ever. Your only safety lies in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, and obeying his commandments. Therefore use what common sense would suggest to you as the means for obtaining faith. If I were told in the vestry after service something by a true friend whose word I could not doubt, and yet if what he said seemed incredible, I should express to him a wish to believe it. I would not wish to imply for a moment that *he* was not truthful; but somehow I find it difficult to believe the remarkable statement that he made. What should I do in the case? If it was pressing that I should believe this statement, I should ask him, "How did you come by the information? Where did you hear or read it? What are the precise facts?" Perhaps the moment that he mentioned where he got it from I should conclude at once that the wonderful statement was unquestionably correct. Or if he said, "Well, I give it to you on my own authority; but if you want any further information, you can get it by reading such and such a document: here is the document,"—why, I should read it directly. I should read with a good deal of happy prejudice in favour of my faithful friend. Anyhow, I should read it to see whether I could fully believe what he said, because I should be sure that he would not intentionally deceive me. Now, if there be anything in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, or anything about himself that you question, let me invite you to read over the four gospels again, especially the story of his crucifixion. That cross of his is a very wonderful thing, for not only does it save those who have faith in it, but it breeds faith in those who look at it.

"When I see him wounded, bleeding,
Dying on th' accursed tree,
Then I feel my heart believing
That he suffered thus for me."

There is life in a look at Christ, because in the very considering of Christ there is the breeding of a living faith. We listen to the word, and faith cometh by hearing. We read the word, and picture the whole thing before our eyes, and we say, "Yes, I do believe it. I never saw it quite in this fashion before, but I now believe it, and I will risk my soul on it."

Now, dear hearts, if any of you who have never trusted Christ will trust him to-night, if you perish I will perish with you! For, though I have known my Lord these five and thirty years, I have no other hope of salvation than I had when I first came to him. I had no merits of my own then, and I have none now. I have preached many sermons, offered many prayers, given much alms, brought many souls to Christ; but I place all that ever I have done under my feet, and desire, as far as it is good, to give to God the glory of it; but as far as it comes of myself, I would sink it in the sea. I am saved in Christ, by faith in

him; but confidence in myself is detestable to me. I dare believe in Jesus Christ as my all in all, but I am less than nothing before him.

Come; we start fair, you see. If we start to-night, you and I will start on a level, with the same confidence in the same Saviour, the same blood to cleanse us, and the same power to save us, and we will meet in heaven. As surely as we meet at the cross, we will meet where the Saviour wears the crown. Oh, that you would trust him now, and believe him. "I have no good works," says one. Then for certain you cannot trust in them. You will be forced to trust in Jesus only. "Oh, but I have no good feelings." I am glad to hear you say so Then you are not tempted to trust in feelings, but will be drawn to trust wholly on your Lord. "Oh, but I feel so unfit." Very well, then you cannot trust in your fitness, but must trust in him alone. It is a blessing when spiritual poverty forces a man into the way of life.

III. Here I close with these words. This woman said in her heart, "IF I DO TOUCH the hem of his garment, I shall"—what? "I shall be made whole." It is not "If I may but touch I *may be* made whole." No; she had got over the may-be's in the first struggle. It is "If I may I shall." If you trust Christ you shall be made whole. If you do to-night actually repose yourself in Christ, as the Lord liveth, you must live and be saved. Unless this Bible is all a lie, unless Jesus was a rank impostor, unless the eternal God can change, you that come and trust yourself with Jesus must and shall be saved in the last great day of account.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day,"

for I shall tell the Lord of his own promise, and how he bade me trust him; and if I am not saved then his word is broken, and that can never be. He *is* true. Oh, it is this that some of you want to have done with—thinking, and talking, and considering, and hoping. You need now to come and trust, resting yourself fully and wholly on what Christ has done. He loved, and lived, and died that sinners might not die. He wrought a complete work, of which he said as he expired, "It is finished." There is nothing for you to add to it, nothing for you to bring with you to make that work complete; but you yourself, stripped naked of every hope, black, foul, guilty, abominable, the worst of the worst, have only to come and look up to those five wounds, and to that bleeding, thorn-crowned head, and to say, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit," and you shall be saved. It is done. "Thy sins which are many are forgiven thee. Go, and sin no more." Thou art his child. Go and live to the glory of thy Father; and may the peace of God that passeth all understanding be with thee for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew ix. 14—38.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—548, 614, 612.

The preacher found within a few hours that this sermon had led two or three persons into liberty, and therefore he begs his readers to scatter it abroad.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE LION AND THE BEAR: TROPHIES HUNG UP.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 25TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."—1 Sam., xvii. 36, 37.

DAVID had lived with God. Throughout many a solitary day he had kept his father's flock among the lone hills of Judah, and had worshipped the Unseen but Ever-present Lord. He had grown into an adoring familiarity with the Most High, so that to him the name of the one only living and true God was a deep and solemn joy. As you may have spied far up among the ramparts of the mountains a solitary lake, whose one office it is to mirror the face of heaven, so had David's hallowed life become the reflection of the light and glory of the Lord of hosts. It had not occurred to him in his meditations that base men would dare to challenge the infinite majesty of God, or that proud adversaries would come forward and defy the chosen people of the Most High; and now that he hears the defiance and beholds the challenge, all his blood is up. He starts! A holy rage is upon him! Yes, it is true; he hears Jehovah blasphemed! How can it be? The youth's holy soul is undergoing a new experience, he is bringing his whole life to bear upon it; he reaches the conclusion that as bears and lions die when they meddle with sheep, so must Goliath fall now that he dares to attack the Lord and his people.

When David finds himself in the camp, and when he hears Goliath of Gath pouring forth his blasphemies against Jehovah, and defying Jehovah's people, he has no thought of having been mistaken in his former lofty adoration, he entertains no notion of adopting a lower style; but he inwardly burns with indignation against the infamous reviler. An insult against God cannot be allowed. This abominable blasphemer must be silenced. Somebody must put him down, and so dispose of him that none shall ever dare again to do the like. David enquires whether somebody or other is not going to batter the brazen champion. If any man in the camp will meet this huge man-mountain, David will not stand in his way; he is not so covetous of glory as to deprive a more

deserving person of these huge materials for renown. But it is imperative that some hand should silence that hillock of proud flesh. It is driven in upon David's devout heart that this blasphemous mouth must be shut, and God's name and God's people must be clear of such a brutal enemy.

About the stilling of this enemy and avenger David has no enquiry to make. It is going to be done, done soon, and done without any particular display. When he kept his sheep and the lion came, David did not raise the question whether he could kill the lion: he killed him, and then the question was settled. When the bear came, and was about to rob him of one of his lambs, he did not say to himself, "Have I a call to kill that bear?" Not he; but he killed him, and then he knew he was called to do it. He feels within him at this moment, "If nobody else will deal with this Philistine difficulty, I must do so; for I cannot live and see God opposed. Jehovah is all in all, and beside him there is none else: he can put an end to an opponent with a word; it must not be that he shall be insulted continually after this fashion. I feel an impulse upon me. This Philistine has defied the armies of the living God, and down he shall come." And so, yielding to the diviner impulses by which the truly great are led, David puts himself forward to stand in single combat with an enormous giant. Observe a stripling set over against a son of Anak: but when you have made the observation be sure to note that the stripling by no means asks your sympathy, or appeals to your pity. It sometimes happens that a tremor will come over a man when he feels that he has stepped out of the ranks, and come forward without any call from his fellow-men,—when he feels that he has taken up Jehovah's quarrel, and constituted himself the champion of the Most High. If he is not quite sure about his commission, and if he is not quite sure that God is with him, he will soon repent his own temerity, and make an ignominious retreat. In David's case there is no flush of excitement, no fierce light of eyes lit up with a semi-madness. Evidently he is quite at home, and has the entire business well in hand. He tells us why he is so bravely venturesome. It is well worth our while to see what made David so strong and confident; for, if it has never occurred to us hitherto, it may yet occur that we shall be called out to do some deed of daring for the Lord. Come, let us learn how to be Davids should a voice call us from among the sheepfolds. I wish that young men here would aspire to brave lives for the God of Israel. I would that for truth, and goodness, and the eternal glory, they would be ready to rise to the measure of their destined hour. Why should we all be mean men? Is there not room for a few downright devoted beings, who will lift their hand unto the Lord, and never go back? If self-sacrifice is wanted, let us make it. If some one is needed for a heathen land, or to bear testimony for truth in this almost apostate nation, let us cry, "Here am I! Send me!" God's David will not hang back through cowardly fear or dread of consequences, but will take up his place as God shall help him, and say, like Martin Luther, "I can do no other: so help me, O my God."

We shall see what made David so calm and self-possessed as to venture where nobody else would venture, and take up the gauntlet

and dare to be the champion of the living God. Oh, souls that dwell apart, and wear each one a lone star upon his brow, here are kindred flames for you!

The first head will be, *the confidence of David*, and when I have spoken upon that, as God shall help me, we will then consider, for a little time, *David as the type of the great Son of David*, and think about *that confidence which we ought to repose in him.*

First, THE CONFIDENCE OF DAVID. He does not go to this battle with any kind of hesitation, calculation, or question of fear, but he is quite sure of the result, and proceeds about it with a quiet reserve of force. One would have thought that he himself was a colossal presence, and that the person to be assailed was some pigmy, for he talks with such calm assurance,—"Let no man's heart fail him. Thy servant will fight with this uncircumcised Philistine." It would have been fearful brag if it had not been simple matter of fact.

1. *The confidence of David*, in the first place, *was grounded upon his own personal experience.* Beloved, if you would display strong confidence in God, firm, calm, steady, you must look in large measure to the experience you have had of the goodness and faithfulness of God. The Lord in mercy often keeps young beginners from those severe and heavy trials which befall the more advanced, because to them this fountain of strength, namely, a profound personal experience, is not yet accessible, except in rare instances. The young have not as yet obtained much experience of the things of God; but those who have been led onward in the divine life a certain distance have tried and proved the promises, and the promise-keeping power and faithfulness of God, and they can draw from this well with the highest results.

But, beloved, I would have you remember that experience does not come to people if they sit quite still. When David was young in years he was old in experience, because he had watched the hand of the Lord in its dealings with him. He had not been an idler among the hills, but a worshipper, a worker, a student, a practical, living man of God. You must go and meet an experience if that experience is to bring you riches in both its hands. I mean this, David's experience was that God delivered him out of the jaw of the lion, but he went and fought that lion; by his own dauntless valour he took the lamb out of his mouth, and he laid hold upon his jaws, and rent him in pieces. David went forth to meet that experience. And the bear—that came to David, certainly; but then he did not sit still and watch the bear, and let it come and roar, and ravin, and then retreat as it liked; but he struggled with that bear, and he slew him, and thus he gained his experience by the active discharge of his duty as a shepherd. He did what he was called upon to do with holy daring, and in so doing he learned the faithfulness of God. Many men have lions and bears, but no experience. Be alive, and get something out of all that happens around you.

You younger Christian men and women, I do pray you be faithful to your God; and put your trust in him. Try to do in your earliest days brave things, because in this manner you will be gaining and storing up an experience which will make you strong in after days to attempt yet more for God. I long to see a better race than the present, and how shall that be prepared but among the brave and loyal-hearted youth of

to-day? Do you not know the way in which God rewards his faithful servants here on earth? He does it usually by enabling them to do in the future something more than they have done before. You have fought in that battle. Take this as your reward,—you shall fight again to-morrow. You have achieved a second victory? Take this as your guerdon: you shall be led to a still sterner fight. Oh, you who have frowned down the face of death, and have bearded destruction in its own den, you shall lead a second forlorn hope, and pluck victory from the bloody brows of battle. You shall be among the choice warriors of the King, first in every fray. Some, perhaps, may think this a small reward, but this shows that their hearts are not yet raised into the lordlier chivalry, nor sworn into the innermost love of the great King. When the heart is wholly given up to Christ, our one desire is that we may glorify him.

Therefore, I would have you take care and kill your lions, and kill your bears, that you may store up your experiences, and be able to kill your Philistines. If David had not killed the first lion and bear, he would not have been able to meet any other ferocious creatures. There is any quantity of them about; but no one but brave David had specially cultivated their acquaintance: I say there is plenty of the raw material of experience about, only people do not go in for it. These evil creatures are up and down, all over the place, lions of one kind and bears of another, tearing or roaring, howling or hugging, drawing down or tossing up—in every way trying to destroy us; and if you be a born hunter, you shall have ages of experience within the next twelve months. Take care that you do it. Do not become constant idlers, and then talk about Christian experience. Oh for true, deep, rich experience! Some of you need it badly enough. What kind of experience will some professors have when they come to be sixty or seventy years of age? They never laboured in the Sunday School to teach a child, never stood up to preach Christ, never penetrated a lodging-house, nor entered a midnight-meeting to try and find out a wanderer for Jesus. These have no experience: they are hollow as drums. They have done nothing; their spiritual life has been a blank. If a sharp trial should come to them, upon what experience could they fall back? They are soldiers who have never smelt powder! Warriors who faint at the sight of blood! How shall they win eternal victory, who till this hour have taken their ease, and declined the labour and the danger of the war? I charge you, therefore, my beloved brethren and sisters, who know the Lord, be up and in earnest to slay your lions and your bears, that you may learn how to kill your Philistines: that is to say;—serve God with all your heart, and patiently bear the cross for his name's sake, so that when the time shall come for you to stand as a lone man for Christ, you may do it gloriously, and may bring honour to your divine Leader. As stands a rock in mid-ocean, bearing the full fury of the storm, so may we, in strength derived from a long, happy, useful experience in the past, be steadfast and unmovable, for the truth, and for the Cross.

That is our first note about David's confidence—it comes from experience, and ours must do the same.

2. You will notice, secondly, that in his confidence there is a *blending of the human with the divine.* Observe: "Thy servant slew both

the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them":—That is the human. "David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine":—That is the divine side of it. In God's word the car of truth runs on two rails of parallel statement. A great many people want to pull up one of the rails. They will not accept two sets of truth. "Predestination and free agency, do not agree," so the modern Solomons assert. Who said, "they do not agree"? They do agree as fully as two rails on the tram line; but some narrow spirits must set aside either the one or the other, they cannot accept *both*. This has long been a puzzle on paper, but in practice it is ease itself. So here the practical action of the believer, throwing his whole might into his Master's service, perfectly well agrees with his falling back upon the working of God, and knowing that it is God that worketh all things for him. David's slaying of the lion and the bear and the Philistine is clear; but God's delivering him out of the jaw of the lion, and the paw of the bear, and the hand of the Philistine, is equally clear. Make it plain to your own self. I believe that, when I preach, I ought to prepare and study my sermon as if its success altogether depended upon me, but that, when I am thus thoroughly furnished, I am to trust in God as much as if I had done nothing at all. The same view should be taken of your life and of your service for God. Work as if you were to be saved by your works; and then trust Christ only, since it is only by faith in him that you are capable of a single good work. Work for God with all your might, as if you did it all; but then always remember that "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." How is that Philistine to be killed? "By God," says one. True; but not without David. "By David," says another. Yes, but not without God. Put the Lord on the march with David and you put the Philistines into untimely graves. When David moves to the fight, God being with him, off comes Goliath's head. Nor champions' heads, nor demons' helmets, can stand against the man of God. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

"Oh, but," they say, "Paul *may* plant, and Apollos *may* water," and yet nothing may come of it, for only God can give the increase. Where is that in the Bible? It is not there at all. The pure word is set to another key. According to the Scriptures the text runs, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase"; when believing people work, and follow up the work of the one with the service of the other, working together in sacred unity, then God gives the increase. It is not "Paul *may* plant, and Apollos *may* water," and they *may* do this in confidence in God, yet they *may* be disappointed. Not at all. It is not the Lord that is ever in question: we are the questionables. God is never behindhand, though we often are. Do not say, "David may go with his sling, and David may go with his stone." No, but if David goes with his sling and stone, in the name of the Lord of hosts, nothing can defend Goliath's forehead. He is bound to fall on his face to the earth. If you and I will go in the name of the Lord God of hosts to do what he calls us to do, our work shall be done. We shall not invoke that sacred name in vain, nor shall we be guarded and belted about with

the divine omnipotence, and after all make a failure of life. That is a happy confidence in God which clearly sees the blending of the human with the divine—the human nothing as to self-confidence, the divine everything as to the glory; yet the divine the more divine, because it condescendingly stoops to use the human.

3. Thirdly, I want you to notice in David's confidence that *he had so practically observed the service of the human side that he speaks of it first.* Concerning his experience, David says first, "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear." In fact, he begins not with what God did, but with what he did himself. Hear him,—"Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him." David does not conceal the fact that he had given both lion and bear their due. There is neither modesty, humility, nor truthfulness in giving the lie to the grace of God within you. A holy act should not be repudiated by its author any more than a brave boy should be disowned by his father. If you did work valiantly by the help of the Spirit of God, you did do it, and should not refuse to say so. How are you to glorify God by denying the fruit of his Spirit? It is the glory of God that he led you to holy labour, and helped you in it; and though you would not speak to your own honour, yet the Lord must be praised,—praised out of the weakness and unworthiness of our human nature. David speaks of the human side first, because Saul had said to him, "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine." In effect he replied, "Hear what I did, and see whether I am not able to meet the case." Sometimes when the question is asked, "Is this possible?" let the Lord's anointed one say, "Ay, for I have done it myself." In a slothful church, a church that has no faith in God—and there are many such—the question is asked, "Can this be done—done by such poor creatures as we are?" It is not an ill thing if one who has had experience of the Lord's power bears a bold testimony, and says, "This can be done, for in days gone by I did the like." What is wanted is to give facts and dates, and get into the region of reality. David put the human into the very forefront. I wish you would remember this when you hear the idle night-birds hooting at our working for the Lord. The lazy-bones of our orthodox churches cry, "God will do his own work"; and then they look out the softest pillow they can find, and put it under their heads, and say, "The eternal purposes will be carried out: God will be glorified." That is all very fine talk, but it can be used with the most mischievous design. You can make opium out of it, which will lull you into a deep and dreadful slumber, and prevent your being of any kind of use at all. God delivers David, and Israel, and slays Goliath; but David is also there in full force, and nothing is done without his sling and stone. David does not hesitate to state it, and the Holy Ghost does not hesitate to record it: why should it be otherwise? Personal action; keep that ever before your reverent eye. Every man has his own place to fill. Fill yours. There is something for you to do. By God's grace do it.

4. But now again, although David thus speaks of the human first, yet

he speaks of the divine most. "No, say you: he does not speak of the divine *most:* there are several verses about the human, and we have only one upon the divine." Listen! All the points which David makes concerning the human are about the divine too; for when a man who has faith in God speaks, if he says, "I did this, I did that,"—it is but another, and sometimes a braver way of saying that God did it. Of course, we all believe in miracles, and that God can do anything and everything. But hearken: we do not believe in God using such poor creatures as we are, though that would be the greatest miracle, and the most astonishing marvel. It would be a marvellous thing indeed, if at any time one of us should cry, "I did it: I did it. The Lord has worked through such a creature as I am." It is a solemn pleasure to feel that the ever-blessed Lord has used you for his praise. I have felt it to be a joy too great for words, and I have bowed my head to worship under a sense of so high an honour. Be not slow to see the hand of the Lord working with you and by you. It may sometimes be more practically useful to believers to hear of what God did by you than to hear abstractly of what God has done by his own bare arm. It redounds more to God's glory that he has wrought acts of grace by such poor creatures as we are than if he had wrought them by seraphim and cherubim. Not without men doth God aim at his highest glory, or else they would not have been created; but *in* men and *by* men will the Lord be great to the ends of the earth.

5. Now I want to go a little farther, and show that *David's confidence rested mainly in the immutability of God, the divine Worker.* He says, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." In the divine character there are usual features and ordinary lines of action. God has "*ways.*" He does not behave in one manner to-day, and in another to-morrow, but his tones and methods are fixed. Our God is not capricious; we know what to expect from him, for he has revealed to us "the way of the Lord." All through the Bible you read of God's way. Therefore, when certain events happen we know where they will end. From experience of the past we gather prophecies of the future, and we foretell things to come. Let me show you a few objects in conjunction, and let us take observations. See! Before my mind's eye there pass a lion, and a believing man: God gives that believing man victory over the lion. Study the second picture;—A bear and a believing man: God helps that believing man to get the victory over the bear. God, who is the same to-day as yesterday, will be the same to-morrow. A third picture is before me,—a huge giant, and the same believing man—well, God will give him victory over the Philistine. I am sure of it. It is the way of him. I want you, my dear brother, to feel that if God has blessed you in the past he will bless you still. You were helped: you can never forget it: you were helped right through. It was a severe crisis in your life, and you were wonderfully carried over it: does not this fact fill you with hope? There came another somewhat different trial, as different from the former trouble as a bear may be from a lion; but you were again helped—very remarkably helped. You have not forgotten it: you cannot forget it though your hair be grey. Are not such encouragements very many and very sweet? Why, I can furnish my

whole house with the bears' skins and lions' skins. Are we going to be discouraged now? Here is another crisis, and there is another difficulty: are you dismayed? The way of God—have you not learned it yet? Do you not know God's habitudes by now? If he helped you then, and then, and then, and then, he will surely help you now. Why you must feel, I should think, like Drake when he had been round the world, and yet was nearly wrecked at the harbour's mouth. He was coming up the Thames, when a fierce storm broke over him, and his ship was well-nigh driven on shore. He cried to his sailors, "No, no, this won't do. We have been safely round the world, and we are not going to be drowned in a ditch like this. We shall get safe up to London." Your present affliction is a mere ditch of a trouble compared with what you endured years ago. You who have breasted Atlantic billows, are you doomed to drown under the languid ripples of an everyday life? Let it not be so. "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them. The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." We serve an immutable God. *We* change a thousand times a day, but he changes never. Our pilgrimage leads us along a good old way; our chart and our compass are the same as those of our youth; and the divine consolation, upon which alone we rely, is in every respect unaltered and unalterable. Hear Jehovah speak,—"I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

6. This leads me to close by observing that *David's confidence also proceeded upon his firm conviction that, the immutable God being with him, he himself would be sufficient for the present emergency.* Now, you see, I bring the man in again, but it is that you may think of God all the more. We want immutability applied to ourselves, or we are not comforted. It is a very easy thing to say, "Yes, God is unchangeable;" and then we turn round and say,—"God is glorious, but I am such a poor creature." Yes, and you were such a poor creature when you slew the lion; and just such a poor creature when you slew the bear. If you are just such a poor creature still, it is probable that by just such a poor creature God is going to get to himself one more victory to the glory of his great grace. Does it ever come over you who are getting into years to tremble at times? to tremble involuntarily, with a sore sense of utter nothingness? Your trembling is partly physical weakness, and partly mental weariness: you say, "For what God has helped me to do, to his name be praise!" But you go on to enquire, "Can I continue under so great a pressure? Shall I do this present deed, and bear this present burden which my Lord has laid upon me?" Why, dear friend, of course you will. What you have done before you will do again; and greater things than these will you do. I want you to unite with David in a sense of personal capacity for all the outlying future. Not only say, "The Lord that delivered me will deliver me," but say also, "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and thy servant can slay this Philistine too. Yes, I killed the beasts, and in God's name I will kill the champion." Old battles lend us new weapons. Yesterday's griefs are the mothers of to-day's joys. An old affliction may prove to be the best cure for

new distress. Poor, poor Mary! She weeps for Lazarus; but Jesus will comfort her concerning her brother. Are not his former mercies laid up in store in her soul? Her heart had known secret passages of gracious experience, which prepared her to see her brother rise again. And you, poor Thomas, beginning to doubt; why, Thomas, you are the very man who lost estate, and health, and yet glorified God! Oh, brother Thomas, we shall not believe your hard speeches against yourself: you are the man who bore the brunt of poverty, and slander, and persecution, and bereavement, and sickness; and you triumphed in them all. You sometimes tell other people how wonderfully, when you were in the fire, another walked with you amid the glowing coals. And have you not sometimes said that your afflictions are among your most precious possessions? Well, and God will bless you still. It shall not only be the same God, but it shall be the same Mary, and the same Thomas, working still as God would have them work, and bearing up under trials, and proving themselves to be more than conquerors through him that loved them.

"Ah, you do not know my trouble, dear sir!" No, my dear friend, and you do not know mine, and I am not going to tell you. It would not comfort you if I told you my distresses; and it certainly would not comfort me if you told me all your ailings, and moanings, and sighings. I expect that we have each to suffer the best trouble that could have been appointed us. If you had my cross it would be an unsuitable burden for you; and if I had yours, it would be a grievous load for me. Never let us dream of changing, nor even of comparing our different lots: the settlements of Providence are wiser than our fancies; the will of the Lord is better than the wit of man. Let each man choose the cross which God has chosen for him. He knew our weight, and how to adapt our burden to our strength. If any good is to come of the rod, it will be a rod that is handled by the Lord in his own way; not under the direction of our daily folly, but under the guidance of his infinite wisdom and prudence. He knows where each one of us requires to come under discipline. He knows the specific nature of each believer, even as a careful vine-dresser understands the peculiarity of each of his vines. In the season of pruning the Great Husbandman knows which branch wants cutting off. You cry, "Not so, Lord. Here is a branch lower down; if I must be pruned, cut that off." The Lord is going to spare that shoot, for it is a fruit-bearing one; but the other which you like so much would only run to wood, and so he is going to cut it away. Afflictions sent us according to our own desires would not be afflictions, but amusements. The bastinado applied by the culprit himself would not amount to much. I do not know that we should be able to make a wise selection of afflictions even if we had the choice of them. I am afraid that we should be like the soldier who was never pleased by the drummer. When he cried, "Do not hit me so high," the drummer tried him lower down. But he did not like that any better, for he cried, "Higher! Higher! Don't cut me in pieces!" Now, in very truth our afflictions anywhere, or anyhow, are grievous. We would rather escape them altogether, and therefore it is not left to our choice; but the infinite wisdom of God appoints the affliction, and appoints it suitably to the man.

I fall back on that fact. David is confident that God is with him. He is confident also that he is with God. He is confident that God has helped him—confident that he was enabled to do valiantly in years gone by, by the divine help, and that he will do so again, and so he comes forward to meet the present emergency.

I do not know for whom my message at this hour may be specially meant. It comes to me ruggedly, but with a good deal of impressiveness. I have an inward conviction that there are some here to whom it is sent—children of God who are placed in positions where it is incumbent upon them to stand out, and bear open witness for the truth. There is little doing for the Master: everybody is cowardly and backward. Awake, ye brave! Speak out, speak out, and silence the foe! Like packs of hounds the proud thinkers mouth it against the Lord; but a single fearless voice will quiet the whole kennel of them. Come to the front of the fight, ye that are truly men, and the Lord will be with you. Remember how he has helped you in times past, and let the God of your salvation be your God for ever and ever.

Now, I am going to close with a few remarks upon the second head. DAVID IS A VERY FIT AND WONDERFUL TYPE OF THE GREAT SON OF DAVID, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

If Saul had really believed David—which I am afraid he did not—the story that David told him should have encouraged him to have placed much confidence in the young hero. Any believing man in the camp who really trusted Jehovah, as David did, would have said, "I see in you, young man, one whom God has smiled upon. He has enabled you to slay both a lion and a bear, and therefore I am assured that you will give a good account of this uncircumcised Philistine before long." Transfer all this from David to David's Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, and it comes to this:—What he has already done should constrain us to believe in him. I speak both to saints and sinners for a moment to-night. If you have any doubt about whether Jesus Christ is able and willing to help you in your present trouble, and to deliver you from your present doubt, and despondency, and despair, remember what he has already done. He has left the thrones and royalties of heaven to be born into this world as a babe, and to hang upon a woman's breast. It is a marvel. We speak of it as though we understood it, but we do not. The Incarnation is a miracle among miracles, and rises like an Alp above all other mountains of mystery. It is a wondrous thing that the One Almighty God should veil himself in a human form, but Christ has done so. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Being found in fashion as a man, our Lord bowed himself to learn obedience by the things which he suffered. He lived a life of sorrow, temptation, slander, reproach, that he might finish the work entrusted to him. In nothing failing, he fulfilled the obedient life, and prepared for the atoning death. The time came for him to encounter greater foes than he had met before, but this did not disturb him: calmly he met all things as they were appointed him. He came at last to his cross, and there the stupendous load of human guilt was laid upon his shoulders, and he bore it all. As in righteousness he was strong to labour, so in atone-

ment he was strong to suffer. It needed Deity to bear the weight of human guilt, but he did bear it, and he so bore it that he finished transgression, and made an end of sins, and made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness for his people. You see he slew each lion and bear as it came, and in nothing was he dismayed. Then he went down into the grave, and met with death, and grappled with it. Death, by dying, he destroyed. He rifled the sepulchre, and brought resurrection to light for all his people. Wondrous was that battle of Christ with the lion of the pit for our sakes! He kept his flocks by night and by day, never failing to protect his own. The lion prowled around, and sought to enter the sheepfold; but the Shepherd's watchfulness was always there to keep him off. At last, with a tremendous roar, the monster leaped into the sheepfold. He had hoped that all were slumbering; but divine love never sleeps. The Shepherd received him on his breast, and held him aloft till he had strangled him. As Samson rent the lion of old, so did our Good Shepherd destroy the destroyer when he laid down his life for the sheep.

All this is done and finished, and you may trust our divine Immanuel to do all that remains. Nothing remains to be done for a sinner that is at all comparable to the far greater things which have been done already. Infinitely more has been wrought for and in a child of God than he will ever want between now and heaven. He may trust Jesus for that little remainder, if any remainder there be, since so much has been already achieved. As I see our great David going forward now to meet any lion that lurks in the way against his people, or any Goliath that stalks abroad and defies the host of God, I feel perfect confidence that he who slew the lion and the bear will make sure work of all that is yet to arise.

Dear friends, at the present time we may be comforted, whatever our adversary may be, by the full conviction that there is as much necessity for Christ to meet our present adversary as for him to meet the former ones. David slew the lion and the bear: it was needful that they should be slain. When the time came, it was equally needful that Goliath of Gath should be slain. And so to-day, if your sin has been removed by Christ, one great necessity has been supplied: if you have now been brought to a dead halt, another necessity has arisen, and another supply will be forthcoming. Our Lord never fails to do everything that is necessary for his people. He never has bungled over anything yet, and he never will. He will not fail nor be discouraged till the Eternal purpose is fulfilled, and the blood-bought ones are safe at the right hand of God, even the Father. Wherefore, comfort yourself with that full conviction.

I believe also that an imperious necessity to work rests upon the heart of Christ now, even as it did aforetime. Our ever sympathetic, ever immutable Lord, has the same power at this moment wherewith to meet the renewed necessities of his beloved. Power! He has infinite power! If when he was here in weakness he destroyed sin and death and hell, what will he not do now that all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth? Oh, my soul, how delightful it is to plunge into a bath of faith and rest in Jesus! Not trust Christ?

Not trust Christ, sinner, now that he is at the right hand of God? Why, his children of old trusted him when he was a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief! Not trust him at whose girdle swing the keys of heaven and death and hell? Not trust him whose very wish is law throughout all worlds that God has made? Begone, O base suggestion! Oh, come and trust him, whatever the difficulty! Trust him over the head of Goliath, for he hath already slain both the lion and the bear.

It comes to this: that we must just go forward against everything that stalks before us in opposition, for there can be no reason why Christ should not overcome it, since he has overcome all that has gone before. I know that we are always apt to think that our present trial is peculiar and surprising; but there are no surprises with Jesus. He foreknew all that would happen to his people before he undertook to save them. He shed not his blood in the dark: he knew what they would be. If they wander and fall into sin, he foreknew it all; and all hardness of heart, and everything else that we lament and deplore. Jesus saw it all, and made provision to save us "notwithstanding all." All that can interpose between us and heaven Jesus can drive away, even as the shadows flit before the sunlight. All has been foreseen, and steadfast love is resolved to see the business through. Our great redeeming Substitute did not pledge his name as our Surety without counting the cost, nor did he enter upon covenant engagements blindly, as silly men too often do. He knew that it would cost him his own heart's blood, but he drew not back. He knew what power would be requisite for the achievement of his purpose, and he was not daunted. He has undertaken, and he will go through with it. As the Lord liveth, Christ will suffer no defeat. You have not to do to-day with a puny mortal man that can be put aside, and huffed, and made to fear and turn his back. You have to do with a greater than David; and if David resolutely ran to meet his foe, and paused not till he came back with his gory head, a grizzly trophy of his courage, you need not be afraid that Christ will return defeated. He has taken up this glove, and he will fight this battle through. He will have the victory all along the line; and when the last great "Hallelujah" goes up to heaven, there will be no laments to mingle with it; neither will Christ have to put away his escutcheon with a bar sinister upon it because he was in part defeated.

Never! "The Lord reigneth." The Breaker has gone up before us, and the King at the head of us. We shall march through, even to the dividing of the spoil. He has led captivity captive, and we shall triumph through his name if we are resting in him. Oh, that you would trust him—you that do not as yet rely upon him! May his great Spirit bring you to believe in him, for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Samuel xvii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84 (Song II.), 73.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE ROAD TO HONOUR.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 12TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."—1 Samuel, ii. 30.

OUR chickens generally come home to roost. Our thoughts of other men become other men's thoughts of us. According as we measure out to our fellows, so do they measure back into our bosoms, for good or for evil. So especially, in reference to the Lord himself, the God of justice sooner or later causes a man to reap his own sowing, and gather his own scattering. See how the Lord keeps touch with his friends and foes, and pays them in their own coin,—"Them that honour me I will honour, and they that depise me shall be lightly esteemed." A man's life is often its own echo. He sinned, and he suffered after the likeness of his sin: you may see the sin in the punishment, as you see to-day the foot-mark of the Egyptian dog in the brick which he trod upon when it was yet in the soft clay. The man sinned again, for it is the nature of sin to repeat itself and grow into habit: and behold, another sorrow was born in the likeness of that other sin. Thus the man lived in the present, and formed his future life by one and the same act. He spoke, and the echoes spoke to him in the years following. So does life repeat itself; so does the seed develop the flower, and the flower again produce the seed. It is an endless chain; for the thing that has been is the thing which shall be. A man may live to see a grim procession of all his old sins marching past him, robed in the sackcloth and ashes wherein justice dooms them to be arrayed. So is it also with our joys. God gives us joy after the similitude of our service. Godly fear fills her garden with many flowers, and her house with music of divers kinds, and the Lord appoints to her that she shall live of her ministry, and that her oxen shall eat of the good corn which they tread out for others. When we have been faithful to God, he is ever faithful to us, and sends us a full reward. If we walk contrary to him, he will walk contrary to us; but if we delight ourselves in him, he will delight himself in us to do us good. There is good-will to men of good will, and evil shall slay those whose lives are evil.

If you wish to see this exemplified in Scripture, how many instances

rise before you! Enoch walks with God because God pleases him, and then we find that he pleases God. Noah obediently rests the issues of his life upon the truth of God, and God gives him rest. Abraham was famous for trusting God, and it is wonderful how God trusted him. The Lord seemed to put his honour as well as his oracles into the guardianship and custody of Abraham. "Shall I," saith God, "hide this thing that I will do from Abraham, my friend?" Oh, no. God unbosoms his heart to Abraham, for Abraham has unbosomed his heart to God. See, on the other hand, Jacob. He is a good man and true, and I like not to speak of the failings of the faithful. There is a Ham-like propensity in some to point out the nakedness of God's saints; but it is much better to go backward and cover them with the garment of love. Yet we cannot help seeing that Jacob was not so in harmony with God as he should have been, and therefore his life lacked the majestic serenity which attended Abraham's. He begins life by bargaining and by cheating his brother; and all his life long he was bargained with and cheated beyond his heart's content. His cunning came home to him: what he was to Esau, Laban was to him. Yet, as he wrestled with the angel in mighty prayer the Lord gave him the wrestler's name of honour, and as he trusted in the Lord even in his saddest estate the Lord preserved him even to the end. As an instance on the other side, take Moses. He would not be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; but gave up all prospect of a kingdom in Egypt. But what did he get? He became a greater king than any Pharaoh. He led through the wilderness a nation compared with which the Egyptians are mere barbarians. He had all the rank and dignity that could fall to the greatest ruler of his age or of any other age; and his honour after death is to this day infinitely beyond that of all the Pharaohs rolled into one. Moses is an imperial name: among them that are born of woman, whose fame is greater? He is no loser now: he honoured God and he was honoured. Take David, on the other side, and see how his transgressions came home to him. I will not speak of the better character of David just now, though that would abundantly illustrate how God repays his faithful ones: but, when he sinned, the sorrows that embittered the latter end of his life were the reflection of his own offences. One is struck with the family likeness between David's sins and sorrows. Remember the names of Absalom and Adonijah, and you cannot forget the lust and the falsehood of him to whom these young men were both sons and punishments.

Very striking as an instance of the retaliation of providence is the case of Adoni-bezek. When they cut off his thumbs and his great toes, so that he might lose all power to draw the bowstring, and all power, indeed, to go to battle at all, because he could not stand safely in the conflict, he confessed that threescore-and-ten kings to whom he had done the same thing had picked up crumbs under his table. It was his own remark that as he had done God had requited him. Samuel, when he smote Agag, told him that, as his sword had made women childless, so should the sword of the Lord that day make his mother childless by slaying him. Most memorable of all is the instance of Haman and his gallows, fifty cubits high. See how he swings thereon. He built the gibbet for Mordecai. Ah, no; he built it for himself. Thus

are deeds reflected upon those who do them; thus do the cruel fall into the pits which their own hands have digged. Malice uses a sort of providential boomerang. The man flings it with all his force at the foe, and it comes back to him; not into his hand that he may use it again, but across his brow to smite him even to the dust. Take heed what ye put into the measure that ye mete out to others, and especially to God; for "with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

I want to speak this evening very practically and to the point. I shall therefore allow but little garnishing, and simply deal out the plain truth. May the Spirit of God make the meditation useful to us all!

I. And, first, we will speak upon THE DUTY INCUMBENT UPON US ALL, but especially upon God's people, OF HONOURING THE LORD.

As we are God's creatures we are bound to honour God. Think of what he is in himself. He is such a one that if we had no relation to him, but had simply heard of him by the hearing of the ear, we should be bound to honour him. So perfectly holy, so inconceivably gracious, so full of everything that makes up perfection, so devoid of any fault or failure, the infinitely glorious Jehovah should be—must be—honoured by every right-minded man. But then, as he is our Creator, and we owe our very existence to him, it becomes us to pay him reverence. "It is he that made us, and not we ourselves." He is our Preserver: "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." He feeds and leads us every day. Some of you people of God ought, indeed, to honour God with all your hearts because you know that you are his children, and to you adoption yields a fulness of rich comfort. He asks, "If I be a Father where is mine honour?" He has chosen you, and put you among his children: will you not honour him? The Father has loved you with an infinite love; the Son of God has poured out his heart's blood for you; the Spirit of God has tenderly striven with you, and even now dwells in you; will you not honour the Triune Jehovah? Think of the relationship which grace has established between you and the ever-blessed One, and in deepest gratitude you will confess that you are bound to honour the Lord your God.

Among those that bow lowest before him let us be found. If we have crowns of any sort, if any honour or good repute belongs to us, let us cast all at his feet. Angels with veiled faces adore the Lord; let us veil our faces with the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever. To him the cherubim and seraphim lift up their ceaseless cry; let us also unite in joyous praise before the Lord our God. Surely none of you would deny the obligation that rests upon every creature, but especially upon every regenerate creature, to bless and praise and honour the Lord our God. I shall not stay, dear friends, to enter into any argument upon a subject which commends itself to every conscience. If your hearts are right you feel that to honour God is your joy. I know that you love to glorify him. His praise is viewed by you not only as a duty, but as a privilege, and a delight. Oh for more of the power of the Holy Ghost, that we may glorify God by his own Spirit!

Just notice *how* we ought to honour him, and consider wherein this

duty lies. We should honour him *by confessing his deity:* I mean the deity of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The Athanasian Creed is too long, and it enters too much into details; but, in the essence of it, it is most solemn truth; and, though I should not dare to say that the man who did not believe every word of it would "without doubt, perish everlastingly," yet I should feel great trembling for myself if I could not from the depths of my heart subscribe to the blessed doctrine of the Trinity in Unity: one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods but one God." In the way in which God reveals himself let us honour him by accepting his own revelation. We must honour God by receiving that view of him which he deigns to grant us. What know you and I of God? We are nothing: how should we comprehend the All in all. We are insects begotten and buried within a few hours: how shall the creatures of a day understand the Eternal? Men talk about what God must be or should be. What do they know? Can the dust beneath our feet form a just judgment of the stars? It might do so much more readily than we can form any idea of God save that which he is pleased to impart to us by his own revelation. Let us adore Jehovah, as we find him in the Old and New Testaments. If there be any that deny the deity of the Lord Jesus, let us not come into their secret, nor in any respect be joined with their error. Assuredly the Lord Jesus, whom men called the Nazarene, is to us none other than "God over all, blessed for ever. Amen." If men deny the personality or deity of the Holy Spirit, let us the more reverently yield to all his sacred movements within our bosoms, and rejoice to adore him, as intensely as if we strove to make up for the many slights which grieve him. We should honour God in our worship both in public and in private, intensely paying homage unto the God of Israel, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We need not perpetually repeat a form of words, but it will be well for all our private and public worship to flame with the great truth which sparkles in these words—"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

Let us further honour God *by acknowledging his rule.* This is more difficult by far, to most minds. Let it be to you and to me a fixed matter that whatever God forbids we will loathe, and whatever God commands we will follow after. Our failures as to his will should greatly grieve us. When we are conformed to his mind, we shall give him the glory of our sanctification, but we shall be deeply thankful that it has pleased God to make us well-pleasing in his sight. Beloved, I want you especially that are members of the visible church to take care that the rule of Christ over you is supreme. Never hesitate when the command is plain. Evident duties should never be the subjects of questioning. It is not yours to reason why; it is yours if need be to dare and die in your loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our supreme Lord, and we would not wish even to breathe apart from him. It is rebellion against him even to begin to reckon whether obedience will be profitable or not. What greater profit can you desire than to do his will? His sovereign's pleasure is the soldier's best

reward. Shall we not think it joy enough to live for him who died for us? The price of blood was paid for us by his five wounds on the tree of Calvary, are we not henceforth Christ's very own? Yes, let us honour God by a definite, prompt, joyous, constant obedience, as grace shall help us.

Next to that let me add a very important thing. Let us honour the holiness of God and the justice of God and the mercy of God *by repentance whenever we feel that we have done wrong.* You remember how Joshua bade Achan confess, and so give glory to God. There is a measure of honour paid to God by the man who, being conscious of having done wrong, laments it, acknowledges the wrong, and prays for pardon. The prayer of a penitent is true adoration. When I seek for mercy of God, I do thereby confess the rightness of his law and the justice of its threatened punishment, and I do also confess my belief in the goodness of the heart of God, and the graciousness of his nature; and therefore I appeal to him, for Jesus' sake, to put away my sin. A guilty heart cannot better honour the Lord than by a frank acknowledgment of sin, and by casting itself upon the abounding mercy of the God of grace. Do not hesitate, ye guilty ones, to do this. You can make no reparation for the wrong you have done; but the very least thing, and at the same time the very greatest thing you can do, is to say, "I have sinned and done this evil in thy sight, but O most gracious God be merciful to me a sinner." Thus may the sinner give honour unto God.

But, oh, beloved, if you have rejoiced in pardoning love, I would press upon you to honour God *by acknowledging the wisdom of his teaching*, and by a teachableness which accepts his doctrine. I am afraid that many ministers are training men to set aside faith, and to live by carnal reason. This is flat treason against the Lord and his Christ. Faith, to me, means this: whatever God says in his Word I believe; and if I do not understand the fulness of its meaning, I wait for further light, knowing that it must be true if God has said it. But now men judge the Scriptures instead of being judged of the Scriptures. Their own consciousness is to be "the judge that ends the strife," and this part of Scripture is put aside, and that is lifted into undue prominence, according as human judgment questions or approves. This must not be. We live not by thinking, but by believing; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." We live, not by excogitating fresh ideas of what God ought to be, and original conceptions of what God ought to do, but by looking into the Book and believing the fact.

We honour God when we *believe Holy Scripture to be inspired*—infallibly inspired; and, taking it as such, say, "It is not mine to question it, or to argue against it, but simply to accept it." It is to me the delight of my life to admit into my very soul great master truths which I am unable to compass, and yet receive into myself by affection and humble reverence. I cannot comprehend the truth by my understanding, but I apprehend it by my faith, and thus it becomes mine. To love is to understand; at least, it is so to me. Choice food of mysterious truth is received into the mouth of my faith, it gradually dissolves within the stomach of my thought, till I take it by an assimilating and digesting faculty into my very self, and know it even as I am known. This

inward sense of truth is a more real knowledge than mere reason can ever obtain. I know the philosopher sneers. What of him? He is not worth sneering at. Brethren, our whole nature must honour God and worship at his footstool. Is my intellect to play the monarch before God? Nay, but that crown, that royalty of man—his understanding—must be cast before Jehovah's feet. The subjugation of the intellect seems to me to be a great part of conversion, and I question whether men are converted at all unless their reasoning powers bow down at Jehovah's feet as subjects and disciples.

Oh that we might honour God, by vindicating his truth against all comers, saying, "Let God be true and every man a liar"!

Further, we honour God's love by *a daily trust in him.* You honour God, you that scarcely know where to-morrow's bread shall come from, when, having said, "Give us this day our daily bread," you work for it and bless his name that you have work to do. You that suffer sickness, but patiently yield yourselves up to the divine will, believing that even your pains are for your good, and that all is for the best,—you are honouring God by trusting his love. Unbelief dishonours him; but a simple childlike confidence pays homage to him, as true and as acceptable as the song of Cherubim and Seraphim. Trust God about domestic cares, and bodily pains, and daily frets, and you most truly honour him.

And, lastly, upon this point, we also honour God, dear friends, when we *confess his goodness by patiently enduring his will, and especially by rejoicing in it.* The other night our subject was, "We joy in God," and I wish we could keep it as our standing motto. It is such an honouring of God when we take great delight in him. Pulling long faces, pining over our troubles, and whining over our fears—this does not honour God. But in the midst of darkness and gloom still to say, "The Lord is good, and his mercy endureth for ever, therefore will I sing unto the Lord as long as I live,"—this is to honour him. If I be in prison, God shall be my liberty; if I be sick, he shall be my health; if I be poor, he shall be my riches; if I be cast down, his smile shall lift me up. I will praise him while I have any being. This it to honour the Lord, and to all who thus praise him the promise of our text is made, "Them that honour me I will honour."

II. Now this brings me, secondly, to notice THE INFLUENCE UPON OUR DAILY LIFE OF THIS HABIT OF HONOURING GOD.

A man who honours God does this practically; it is no form or farce with him, but a deep practical reality. He does it often *by consulting with God.* What shall I do? Here are two ways that may be equally right or equally wrong. I do not know which to take. The answer is, "Bring hither the ephod." I like that old Scotchman's word when he was puzzled about a matter of duty and wanted to end the debate—"Reach me yon Bible. That settles all." Go to your knees, and cry to God in prayer, and crooked things shall be made straight. Be willing to be guided and you shall be guided. If you blunder on in your self-sufficiency you will soon be in a slough; but if you will wait upon God your steps shall be ordered of the Lord. We honour God by taking counsel of him. Do this about all things, and all things will go right. It is wonderful how very easily things move when the

Lord directs, and how wearily they drag when we trust to our own understanding.

We honour God in our daily life *when we confess him.* It is comparatively a small matter to confess Christ before the church, though I have known some of you rather frightened of doing that. Some are almost afraid to come and talk to me about their own salvation. If anybody is afraid of me he must be a great goose, I am sure, for there is nothing in me that should frighten anybody. I am too glad and too delighted to see anybody about his soul to be frightful to any one. If you go to see any of the elders you will find them more tender still. At any rate, do not be afraid of them. *But the tug of war is to confess Christ before the world.* For the merchant, for instance, to stand up for that which is good and right when he is in a web of false trading, and surrounded by unscrupulous dealers,—this is honouring the Lord. For the workman in the shop, when the men are making fun of every holy thing, to say, "Well, now, I believe in all that, and if you want to laugh at anybody you may laugh at me, for I am on the Lord's side"—this is honouring God. But the tendency is to sneak away and remain quite quiet. Christ seems to have nobody to speak up for him. Is it really so? Is that dark hour being repeated, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled"? Everybody will speak up for the devil. You can hear them in the street far into the night; but as to Christ, how many are there to give him a good word in this time of rebuke? The bulk of religious professors are cowards. Let it not be so with you; but honour God, dearly beloved, by making a confession of Christ even though it may involve you in ridicule. Be decidedly gracious all the more because it will bring you into ill odour. Be firm for that which is right, not wishing to provoke opposition, but being quite able to bear it if it must be borne. Be men! Men are scarce creatures nowadays: men, I mean, who set their faces like a flint and are not to be moved from their integrity and their love to Christ, come what may. Honour God daily by a holy manliness.

Sometimes you can honour Christ *by some distinct service that you can do for him,* or by some special obedience to his will. I know times wherein there are great temptations put in the way of men. Now, mind that you honour God at such times by an unhesitating allegiance. There is wealth apparently to be had for the putting out of your hand; only you could not do it with a clean conscience. Now, honour God, and be bravely poor rather than be shamefully rich. "Get thee behind me, Satan," must be ready in the trial hour. You have an opportunity of making a great change in your position in life; but, at the same time, you would be deprived of opportunities of usefulness, both of giving and of getting good—then let your choice be made promptly. I have always admired the example of the pious Jew who was told that a certain city on the Continent would excellently suit his business. "But," he asked, "is there a synagogue there?" and when they said that there was no synagogue he preferred to stay in another place, that he might worship God, though he would do less business. I do not know that this is often the case among Jews any more than it is among Gentiles; and, I am sorry to say that I know many Gentiles to whom God's worship is no consideration whatever—they would go to

the bottomless pit if they could make large profits. It does not matter where they go, or what becomes of them, so long as gain can warm the palms of their hands. They trample on the name of God and upon Christ's cross, as the Dutch are said to have done in Japan, in order that they may prosecute their business. This spirit is from beneath. God save us from it! Say to yourself, young man, in the very beginning of life, "I will serve God. If I can make money, very well; but my first object is to honour God. If I can gain a competence, if I can have sufficient to retire upon in my old age, I will be very thankful; but I am going to do right and to serve God as long as I live, come wealth or come poverty, come honour or come shame." You are the man that God will honour; I am sure of it.

Then you can honour God with *your substance* when he gives it to you. I will not say much about this; but all through Scripture it is laid down as one mark of a child of God that he holds what he has as a steward, and that he uses it for the promotion of the kingdom of God, and the helping of the poor and the needy. Wherever he is he does not seek substance merely to aggrandize himself; but with all his getting he desires to get a liberal heart, without which the richest man is still a pauper. He longs to be useful to the cause and the kingdom of Christ. He believes in the joy of dedicating his tithe and more unto the Lord. He has heard a voice in his ears, saying, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thy increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

In a word, the man that really honours God seeks *to praise him.* He wishes to make the Lord's name great throughout all the world. His main object in living is that he may make Jesus known,—that he may win more hearts to God, the blessed Father, more minds to Jesus, the brother of humanity, and more souls to the Holy Spirit, the Quickener of the heaven-born race. Oh for a thousand hearts wherewith to love our Lord God, a thousand tongues with which to speak for him, a thousand lives wherewith to glorify him!

But, alas! there are many, I grieve to say, who do not seem to care about honouring God at all. And what is the influence of this upon their lives? Two or three words only upon this sorrowful business.

The influence of this upon their lives is, first, that they do not care to know anything about God, and his Christ, and his Spirit, and his gospel, and his way of salvation. So, if they have a Bible they look at it now and then, but they never seriously read it—never sit down to study it—never turn to God in prayer that they may be instructed in the inner meaning of the Word. They live much the same as they would live if God were dead. It would not make any very great difference to them if there were no God and no Saviour, for they so utterly forget Jehovah and his Anointed. They do not take the trouble to go across the street to hear about him whom they call Redeemer. If there were a lecture upon geology,—if there were a great gathering upon politics and the extension of the franchise, they would be there; but as to serving God —well, they do not seem to think that there is any weight in his claims or importance in his will. They show in their lives that they do not honour God, because they attach no importance to anything that he commands or forbids, or to his grand purposes of grace for our fallen

race. Whether men are saved or lost does not matter to them. Whether Christ died or did not die is no concern of theirs. Those wonderful things which hold angels spell-bound with admiration have no attraction for these men, for whom they ought to have every attraction. Christ dies for men, and yet men pass by and say, "It is nothing to us." These are not only the baser and more thoughtless sort, but persons of intellect and culture do the same.

Hence it comes to pass that these people do not obey God. They obey the laws of their country; they respect the rules of civilized society; but as to the laws of God, they have no care about them. God is so insignificant a factor in their life-thoughts that what laws he may have made or may not have made are no concern at all to them. He may threaten them with hell, but they defy his wrath. He may put before them the joys of heaven, but they would not care for bliss that meant holiness and communion with God. They utterly despise God, and, therefore, depend upon it, they will be despised by him at the last. In that day when they will be swept away as the offal of the universe—in that day when they shall be driven from his presence and from the glory of his power, then shall they know how he hath them in derision. He shall say—even he of the tender lip, and of the pierced heart, and of the tearful eye—even *he* shall say from off the throne, "Depart ye cursed," for they have proved their cursedness by their despising of God, whom they ought to have loved and sought and trusted above all things. He will despise them and banish them into shame and everlasting contempt, for they despised his mercy, and poured contempt upon his justice. The contempt of God and of holy angels and of redeemed spirits must for ever and ever rest on those who showed a contempt of God while here below.

Oh, take heed, dear friends, that you do not despise God. Eli, who was God's high priest, fell into this sin because he thought more of displeasing his sons than he did of displeasing his God. He said to himself, "I cannot speak sharply to Hophni. He is my eldest son, and a man of ripe years. He does behave very badly; but what can I do? I fear I must speak a word to him, but I will do it softly. And Phinehas—Phinehas has some fine points about him. I think he will come right by gentle means; I must not say anything sharp to him." Now in this he honoured his sons with a false honour, and did not truly honour the Lord. I sometimes tremble myself lest I deal too gently with some here present; and I would pray to be forgiven when, in tenderness of heart, I have not liked to speak sharply upon evil things which I know must grieve the Spirit of God in some that are the Lord's people. I would to God you would take more care of yourselves, and watch yourselves, and not grieve the spirit of your minister by things that are not consistent with the will of God, and the holiness of Christ. Do see to it, beloved members of this church, that you do not dishonour my Lord. Do not bring me under this great temptation to speak timidly about these things. We can easily do it, you know; and so can you when you see sin in a brother and do not rebuke that brother when you ought to do so, or when those that are put by God under your own care are allowed to sin with impunity. God help us to be found honouring him, for if we do not rebuke sin, we shall be

dishonouring him, and that may spoil our life as sadly as Eli spoiled his.

In a word, friends, if we do not honour God we shall not make God our guiding star; we shall not make his glory to be our chart and compass; but we shall live to get money,—to get money by fair means or foul, cost what it may. What a Gradgrind a man becomes when he forgets God, and only remembers gold. Oh, the wretches there are who do not care how many poor people are starved so long as they can make a larger profit: into their little miserable souls it never enters that it is a shame to starve the needle-woman or the worker of any kind, by putting them to a killing toil in order to earn the scantiest of food. Some make ambition their guiding star, and when this is the case they do not care what they say in the House of Commons or elsewhere, so long as they can keep themselves before the public. They make a speech to-day which they contradict to-morrow; they blurt out of their mouths the first thing that comes into their heads, whether it be mischievous or beneficial. Be it false or be it true it is no odds to them so long as their speech will catch the ear. Only for themselves do many politicians live. And so with other men besides. The poet will sing that he may show what a poet he is, but he does not dedicate his magic of language to the God who is only to be praised. All gifts should be used for God—all art of genius, and science of mind, and skill of hand. These talents come from him, and to him should they be devoted; but alas! in most cases they are used for meaner ends. There are men whose guiding star is licentiousness: they live to please themselves and to gratify the flesh. Wretched, dung-hill breed as they are, they will go back to the oblivion whence they came, after having, I fear, polluted many who else might have escaped from these corruptions. God save men of this corrupt kind, while yet forgiveness can be found; and may we all come to this resolve —that we will honour God.

III. Now mark—and this is the last point—THE REWARD OF ALL THIS. "Them that honour me I will honour."

Is not this a grand reward? It is not, "They that honour me shall be honoured," but, "Them that honour me *I* will honour." *Does God honour men?* He promises to do so. Compared with the honour which the Lord is able to give, there is no honour which is worth naming in the same day. When God honours a man the glory is glory indeed. One of the French kings gave to a conquering general some £500 a year, or thereabouts, for a wonderful deed of prowess, but the soldier told the king that he would have preferred the gold cross. I do not think I should have had such preference for a bauble; but honour is a precious commodity. To get honour from God is very different from getting it from a king. It was said of Alexander that, of two nobles who had served him well, he gave to one ten thousand talents, and to the other a kiss; and he that had the money envied him who received the kiss. One kiss from the mouth of God would outweigh kingdoms. Honour from God,—favour from God—this is a high reward, which cannot be weighed against ten thousand worlds, and all the glory thereof. "Them that honour me I will honour."

Suppose that a man is a preacher, and *in his preaching* he seeks to glorify God only, and sets forth the finished work of Jesus, and cries

earnestly, "Behold the Lamb of God," God will honour him. He shall not labour in vain, or spend his strength for nought. Suppose another man is living *in the midst of his family*, praying for the conversion of his children, setting them a holy example, chiding them for their faults, and encouraging them in all good things; shall he be without a blessing? Nay. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Some of us know the blessing of honouring God in our families. Where there is family prayer, where God is set before the young as the chief end of their being, God will surely honour such parents by giving them a believing household.

The man who honours God shall be honoured *in his own heart* by peace of conscience,—honoured in his own spirit by the conviction that it must be wisdom to be right and true and honest, and that it can never be under any circumstances right to do wrong, or wise to break a divine command. The highest policy a man can pursue, if he must pursue policy at all, is never to deviate from the strict path of right. A straight line is the shortest distance between any two places; and the shortest way to true happiness and prosperity is to do right though the heavens should fall.

Such a man honouring his God among his brethren shall be honoured of God *in the church*. If he has glorified God in the church by his earnestness and zeal and holy living, his brethren shall mark him, and esteem him. His godliness shall give him weight and influence, and though he may always prefer to take the lowest room, yet shall he be had in honour of them that sit at meat with him.

And *in the world* it shall be the same. I do not believe that a man truly serves God without in the long run winning the esteem of his fellow-citizens. They burned such men of old, but when they burned them they still honoured them; for all over this nation, when Popery was in its prime and saints were persecuted, the country people sat at their firesides and they talked of holy Master Taylor, or godly old Latimer, who had suffered for Christ's sake. Though they hardly dared speak for fear some spy would hear, yet they said what a shame it was; and they muttered to one another what a detestable religion that must be which killed the saints of God. This kind of feeling went through all the tradesmen of London, and even affected the apprentices and serving-men. In country towns and villages everybody said, "What a horrible system this must be which burns our pastors for preaching the gospel!" Then, all of a sudden, they shouted, "Down with it!" The fire, long smothered, at last broke out, and again they said of Popery, "Down with it!" Away went crucifix and pyx and priest; the mass and the mass-makers all went packing, as they had a right to do, for they never brought good to England or to any other land which harboured them. Indignation burned quietly in the land, and though for years it scarcely appeared, at last it found vent, and that thing was done for which it were worth while for all of us to die and ten thousand more: Popery went down, and the gospel went up. The gospel of Christ was proclaimed, and the Bible was unchained that every man might read it. Brethren, you will be honoured in your turn as those men are honoured to-day, if when the worst comes to the worst you are found faithful as they were. Therefore stand to your guns.

Stand to your guns if you die there, for the Lord is coming. I see the banner, I mark the white horse, I hear the Captain's voice. The trumpet rings out, "Behold, he cometh!" Honoured shall that man be who stands with loins girt in his place in the battle, in the day when the Captain is saluted as Conqueror all along the line.

What will become of the sneaking coward in the day of Christ's appearing? Where will the fearful stand, who did not dare to wear the name of Christ for fear of being laughed at? Where will the false-hearted be when the Lord Jesus flames forth in his majesty? Then shall they ask the rocks to cover them, and the mountains to fall upon them to hide them from his face. Dastards that they were, they shall not know where to fly.

Oh come, let us seek our Saviour's face to-night by humble prayer and holy faith. Let us bow before the redeeming Lord, and yield ourselves to him; and then from this day forward be this our one object—to crown him with many crowns who left his crown for us, and to honour God who in infinite mercy has delivered us from going down into the pit. How I wish I might stir some young heart to give itself up to Christ to-night. How I wish I might win some old heart for my Lord. Oh, shipmate, you have had that black piratical flag flying at the mast-head long enough. Down with it now, and sail under the blood-red cross for Christ, and for God, to-night. Let all the old cargo be turned out, and the new be taken in. May the Lord make a clean sweep of everything that is displeasing to him, and then come on board and take the helm and steer you till he brings you to the port of Everlasting Peace.

"Who is on the Lord's side?" Who that has not been on his side will enlist to-night? How is the enlisting to be managed? It is to be done as all enlisting is done. In our army they enlist a man by making him take a shilling. You are not enlisted by giving anything, but by receiving the King's money. Take Christ by faith. Receive him. Stretch out your hand. He shall be the earnest-money to you of the great reward that God will give his saints in the day of his glory, when he shall honour them and make them to "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

God bless you, and may we meet at the right hand of the throne in the coming of the Lord. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Samuel ii. 13—17, 27—36; iv. 10—18.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—95, 34 (Ver. I), 135 (Ver. II).

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A WONDER EXPLAINED BY GREATER WONDERS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 7TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not."—Lamentations iii. 57.

How different are our experiences from our fears! This man of God had said, "When I cry and shout he shutteth out my prayer." He had said again, "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through." He had added even to that, "Surely against me is he turned." But now he corrects his misapprehensions. Neither was prayer shut out, nor had God turned against him; for he joyfully confesses, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not." As much as to say,—"Not only didst thou hear me, but thou didst come to me; not only didst thou hear *me* speak, but thou didst speak thyself, and I heard thee say,—Fear not." Not only wast thou not turned against me as an enemy, but thou didst prove thyself my friend by being my loving and tender comforter.

Brethren, if our experiences have so far exceeded our expectations and belied our doubts, let us take care that we record them. Do not let us suffer our lamentations to be written in a book, and our thanksgivings to be spoken to the wind. Write not your complaints in marble and your praises upon the sand. Let the record of mercy received be carefully made, accurately measured, distinctly worded, correctly dated, and so preserved that in years to come you may turn for your encouragement to it. Jeremiah tells us that on such a day the Lord drew near to him; David remembered God from the Hermons and the hill Mizar; time and place are elements of interest in the memory of the Lord's great goodness. Note the particulars, dwell on the details,—abundantly utter the memory of the divine loving-kindness. May be, your children and your children's children may read the story of your experience for their learning, and nothing can be more fitting than that the fathers should thus lay up for their children. Even though that record should contradict yourself and bring the blush of shame to your cheek to think you should have so calumniated your God, yet write it clearly, and let it stand to the Lord's praise and glory, and your own comfort in some future hour of need. Write it; write it in capital letters; "I said I am cut off, but I

found it was not so. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not."

Jeremiah seems to record this fact with a considerable amount of surprise. He marvels that God should have drawn near to him, for his condition was a very pitiful one. He was so low that life seemed ebbing out, and he groaned, "He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old." In my own estimation I give one of the chief places among mortal men to the prophet Jeremiah. He was sent of God to do a most painful duty, which could not bring any honour to him, nor win for him the love of those to whom he ministered. He was sent to prophesy among a wilful and disobedient people, who would reject his admonitions. Like Cassandra, he spake true tidings and sad tidings, but he was not believed. He pleaded with erring Israel—oh, how he pleaded! No prophet is more pathetic than he. I sometimes read the book right through, and it is a good thing to do that with the books of Scripture, so as to get the run of them; and if you will do this with Jeremiah you will be borne away with the torrents of grief which swept over the prophet's soul. Yet how constant and steadfast he was in love to the very people who provoked and persecuted him. How he cries to God and pleads with him on their behalf, as affectionately as if they had been the most grateful of children, and he had been the most rejoicing of parents. He was a grand man, that Jeremiah. He was as a mountain torrent, familiar at once with great heights and profound abysses, deriving force from his deep descents of woe. When he penned the words of our text his sorrow had come to a climax. They had put him into an underground cistern—I was about to say into a dry well, only it was not dry. He sank in the mire up to the armpits. Reservoirs which at one season of the year were filled with water were frequently used at other seasons as dungeons, and poor prisoners were let down, far beyond all reach of light or fresh air, into such horrible pits, which were often knee-deep in miry clay. May be the time of waterfloods would come on, and the captive would hear the rushing of the waters down the sides of his prison, and feel it flowing over the floor into some lower reservoir: so it would seem to have been with the prophet, for he writes, "Waters flowed over mine head." The prophet's case was deplorable: he was cut off from all sound of human voice, and let him cry as he might there was none to have any pity upon him; he was alone, forgotten, forsaken, refused by the many and abhorred by the few who were in power. Doubtless his spirit sank, and we cannot wonder at it. A strong-minded, passionate patriot who would have saved his country saw himself put aside even from the opportunity to rebuke and to exhort; in the crisis of national calamity when he felt most needful to his people he was put away. Then it was that the Lord drew near to him. When he was most reproached, and most persecuted of men, he had the sweetest sense of the nearness of the Lord whom he served. Beloved, I think we have read enough of the history of God's dealings with his people to understand that this is the way of him,—that if he ever is absent from his people it is not in their time of direst need; and if ever he does reveal himself to them as he does not unto the world, it is when they are bereaven of all outward consolation, and for his sake are made to bear tribulation. The tor-

tured martyr, the banished Puritan, the hunted Covenanter, could each say, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not." The fainting sufferer, the weary worker, the dying believer, has each in like manner joyed in the nearness of the Lord. Is it not written, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God"?

Whatever wonder there was in the heart of Jeremiah that God should draw near to him, you and I must have felt even greater wonder whenever God has drawn near to us. We have cried out, like David, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him?" It is to us a standing miracle that the great and glorious and thrice holy God should ever come and reveal himself in a way of love to us, insignificant, dishonoured, guilty sons of men.

This morning my subject is, first, *an explanation of this wonder*, that God should draw near to us; and then, secondly, *a further enlargement of that wonder*. I hope many of us can say, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee." May the Holy Ghost refresh us while we call this experience to mind.

I. Let us set forth some sort of AN EXPLANATION OF THIS WONDER. God doth draw near to men. He that filleth all things communes with those who are less than nothing and vanity. The Eternal converses with the creatures of a day. He who is inconceivable in the majesty of his nature nevertheless permits us, who are but dust and ashes, to speak with him as a man speaketh with his friend. Why is this? I shall not abate the wonder if I somewhat explain it by mentioning other facts equally wonderful—great things, and unsearchable, drawn from the vast deeps of the divine working.

The first thought I would suggest to you is that *men have ever been in the thoughts of God*. As we are taught by the Word of God, God has always had a very singular regard to man. Of the eternal wisdom we read, "My delights were with the sons of men." Long before man was created it was in the eternal purpose that such a singular and specially favoured being should be formed; and all things concerning covenant purposes and designs were written in that book into which angels may not look. I believe that from of old the creation and the sanctification of elect manhood was the apex of the great pyramid of the divine purpose, the focus of the divine glory, that for which all other things were made. There never was a time in which God in the thoughts of his heart was not familiar with man. Of old there was a covenant of peace on man's behalf, and love everlasting dictated every line. "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" When the time came for man's actual creation those thoughts began to take a visible effect. You must have noticed what a different tone there is in the language of Moses when he reaches the creation of man. The world, the lights of heaven, the trees, the beasts, the birds, the fish, start into life at the almighty bidding; but when it comes to man a council is convened, and the three persons appear, saying, "Let us make man." Here is a clearer revelation of the Godhead, and of the inter-communion

in the divine Unity. It is added, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." There is something of the image and likeness of God in all that he makes; for the work ever bears some trace of the Worker; but "our image, after our likeness," is not for the lion or the eagle, nor for the stars or the sun, but only for man. I read not concerning seraphim, nor any of the angelic hierarchy, that they bear the image and the likeness of God; but so it is written of man: "Let us make man in our image." There was ever about man some high intent of God not then apparent, and, indeed, never seen till he appeared who is at once God and man. In the creation of man the Lord ever had an eye to that Man of men, the Lord Jesus, up to whom all things lead. In the formation of man God widened his communion with his creatures; he began for the first time to hold intercourse with a being who is only in part spiritual, and as to a part of his nature is linked with materialism. God communed with Adam, and thereby placed him in an honour, in which, alas, he continued not. It was a wonderful thing, that creation of man—I shall have to tell you a little more about it before I have done,—but in the very fact that man was made in so special a manner there was a drawing near of God to man.

Afterwards all the providences of God worked for the creation and conservation of a chosen seed; the fetching out and the maintaining of a people separated from the world—a peculiar people, richly favoured, towards whom all the thoughts of God were thoughts of love. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut. xxxii. 8). Whether it be Shem, or Ham, or Japheth, these and their descendants were sent hither and thither where they might best subserve the interests of the kingdom of God. At this moment the whole conformation of humanity on the face of the globe bears a direct relation to the ultimate church of God. Thrones and crowns must all be subordinate to the main purpose of God concerning his elect; it has been, and it shall be so, even to the end. Depend upon it, the ultimate result of everything in politics has to do with the eternal purpose of God in reference to his church. Whether there be wars, or rumours of wars, or famines, or pestilences; whatsoever armies shall come or go, or dynasties shall rise or fall; all worketh to the one end. The wheels within wheels, all full of eyes, revolve not without purpose, but they move always in a straight line towards this end,—the accomplishment of the design of God in reference to his own elect. I do not, therefore, wonder that God should draw near to his people, when I see him always doing so, and when I perceive that they are most upon his mind and nearest to his heart.

But, secondly, remember that God hath drawn nearer to us than we have as yet hinted at, in becoming *tenderly near in nature.* There was a day, in the fulness of time, in the which the Son of God took our nature upon himself. Marvel of marvels! He that made all things became a babe at Bethlehem, bore all the weakness and infirmity of infancy, passed through all the growth of boyhood, arrived at a toilsome manhood, and then finished his life-course. Jesus did not wear a nature like to ours, but he bore our actual nature—our flesh and blood. Sin is not of the essence of manhood, and Jesus had no sin; but all that

is really manhood belongs to the Son of man, who is also "over all, God blessed for ever." He became verily and assuredly man of the substance of his mother; and this day the next of kin to every believer is the Lord Jesus Christ. We say of him sweetly what Naomi said to Ruth concerning Boaz, "The man is near of kin unto us." Jesus is our next kinsman. If I were in trouble in a foreign land, it would be pleasant to hear the voice of an Englishman; it would be even more encouraging to spy out a neighbour, a fellow-citizen of the same town; but most of all would it be cheering to perceive that a dear friend, a brother, a husband was to the front on our behalf. Such a near and dear friend is Jesus to each one of those the Father hath given him. See, here is your brother, O believer, a brother of such tender sensibilities, and of such quick sympathies, that in every pang that rends the heart he takes his share! Do you wonder, therefore, that when you call upon him he draws near to you? It were not like him to hide himself from his own flesh. It were not like the Son of David to wear a heart of stone towards his poor afflicted brethren. His nature is love itself. He will, he must, come to you that are in sorrow, and sorrow with you, and thus cheer your hearts; for not in vain does he wear your nature, not in vain in that nature has he suffered and died for you.

Nor is this all. The Lord Jesus was *specially near to his people in the days of his life on earth.* He was no mere observer of men, passing through our midst, as an English traveller might pass through China or Tartary, seeing everything, but sharing nothing. It is very beautiful to my mind to reflect upon the nearness of Christ as man to men; for there are certain men who by temper, spirit, and behaviour are a long way off from the rest of mankind. Look at your princes and your autocrats: they are scarcely to be seen with a telescope; they do not appear to be persons of like feelings with ourselves. Look at your exquisites, your men of pride, your men of pretended culture, who bear their heads above the clouds. But Jesus was the most manlike of all men. I could propound to you to-day the theory that Jesus was an Englishman, and prove it from many points of his character, if I did not know that he was of the seed of Abraham. Jesus of Nazareth is a Jew, but there is no Jewish peculiarity about him. He is a man in the broadest, truest sense. It matters not to you or me what nationality he actually came from, for the most cosmopolitan of men was the Christ of God. I know several excellent men whom I love and revere, but I despair of imitating them: the colour of their virtue has a tint in it peculiar to themselves: I am not made of such stuff as would ever work up into their fashion, admirable though it be. But I never thought thus concerning the Lord Jesus: I always feel that by his grace I can become like *him.* He is infinitely superior to those admirable friends of whom I have spoken, and yet he is more imitable. The hill is higher, but in his case there are ways and steps which invite; whereas in the other case there are crags which warn us off. I have known good men with whom I shall never be thoroughly at home until we meet in heaven: at least, we shall agree best on earth when they go their way and I go mine. One never feels so with regard to the all-glorious Lord Jesus. There our cry is, "Nearer, my Lord, to thee. Nearer to thee." He draws us

to himself, and the nearer we come the more fully we appreciate him. If Jesus came thus near to men in his life on earth, do you wonder that he draws near to them now?

Carefully notice that this was a nearness to *sinful* men. For, being here on earth, he did not select for his companions persons of high religious repute, men who practised austerities, or severed themselves from common life. He went down among the fishermen of Galilee, he associated with poor people, uncultured and simple-minded. Aye, he dwelt among the sinful people: "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him." He ate and drank with them, till men said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." He made one at the social board where sat disreputable persons; he ate what they ate, and drank what they drank, and kept up no distinction such as the religious teachers of his day judged to be decorous and needful. You and I are sinners too, and our Redeemer's nearness to the sinners of Judæa meant nearness to us. Oh, it is wonderful, that blessed nearness of Christ to men and women. There were no moats and walls separating him from men, but all comers were received; they advanced right up to his heart unchallenged, and they spake into his soul as though they were familiar friends. Do you think it wonderful that to-day Jesus should draw near unto his own people when they are in their time of sorrow? I do not. Remembering the sweet familiarities of the Nazarene, it seems natural that he should manifest himself to his own redeemed. With holy adoring gratitude would I say, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee:" a favour to be exceedingly valued, but not altogether unexpected from such an one as the Friend of sinners.

Further, dear friends, Jesus Christ *came still nearer to us in his death.* How wonderfully near Jesus came to sinful men when he was delivered up to his enemies to suffer death. To die at all was for him the closest fellowship with man; for death, say what you like about it, must ever remain a penalty for sin, and as such our Lord endured it. He did not pass through death as a necessity of nature, for it was no necessity of nature to him; but he died of set purpose for the bearing of our sin, and the putting of it away by the endurance of the death penalty. Just think of it. Would you have supposed that Christ would come so near to us that he would be found in the felon's dock? Yet there he stood. Do you seek him? Would you speak with him? Will you go to the palace of the king, asking for him? If you do, you must enter the judgment-hall, for there he stands bound, accused, and tried. They charge him with sedition and blasphemy! "He was numbered with the transgressors." There had been an entry made in the imperial registry of his name as a child, born at Bethlehem; and now a second registration must be made of him, and he is entered in Pilate's book as a malefactor—one of three who on the same day were given up to be hanged upon gibbets for their crimes. He was numbered with the transgressors in so effectual a way that he suffered with them. Not only was the registration made, but the decree of Pontius Pilate was carried out,—Jesus died in the common place of execution between two thieves. They put him in the middle because it was the place of pre-eminence: he was judged to be the chief criminal. In the end of

his life, he draws so near us that he dies among transgressors: "He made his grave with the wicked." When they took down the carcases of the thieves they removed his body also, and his remains were given up to his friends as the remains of one who had paid the last penalty of the law. It was not merely in appearance and name that all this was so; for though no sin did ever touch the blessed person of Christ so as to defile it, and he remains for ever one of whom the apostle says, "In him is no sin," yet there was a passing over of sin to him, and by way of imputation he was justly numbered with transgressors, and justly put to death with them. "For the transgression of my people was he stricken." "He bare the sin of many;" he was made "sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." This is coming wonderfully near to us. Sin is of all things the greatest divider between a holy God and an unholy creature, and if Jesus cometh as our Beloved, leaping over the mountains of transgression, and skipping over the hills of sin, what is to divide him from his poor, suffering, but sanctified and justified people? I wonder not that it is written, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee."

He is now in heaven; turn your thoughts up to him there. *In heaven he is still perpetually near us.* Beloved, he has carried our nature into heaven. The body of the Lord Jesus in glory is the same as that which was laid in the tomb. He sits on the throne of the Highest in that humanity which he received of Mary. The nail-prints were visible while he was here after his resurrection; they are manifest still. "He looks like a Lamb that has been slain." His wounds for ever remind the saints of his finished sacrifice. And what is he in heaven? He is there as our Representative. He is member of heaven's high Parliament for the sons of men, and he holds his seat as such. He is head over all things to his church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. What is he doing in heaven? He is not only representing us, but he is preparing a place for us: making a niche in heaven for you, a place in heaven for me; and all the while he is continually offering intercession for his people. "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors," wherefore "he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Oh, thou blessed risen Christ, I am not astonished that thou dost come even to my bedside, and make the watches of the night bright to me with the glory of thy presence, since even the sublimities of heaven and all the sonnets of the seraphim cannot take off thy mind for a single moment from thine own chosen people. Remember how our Lord said of old,—"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." Ever bearing our names upon his breastplate, ever beholding us as graven upon his hands, he is constantly so near to us that he cannot be nearer.

I have thus shown you, I think, why Jesus so readily draws near to us at the voice of our cry; but there is one more matter of which I would speak, and that is so deep and mysterious that I would specially seek the guidance of the Spirit of God before I speak upon it. Far be it from me to set forth mere imaginings. I would only speak as the Scrip-

ture warrants me. Jesus may well come near to his people, for *there is a mystical union which ensures it.* A divine doctrine this, of which Paul saith, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church," and this in relation to the marriage union. As sometimes in the worship of the heathen they cried, "Far hence, ye profane," for only the initiated might draw near to that special mystery, so feel I inclined when I am speaking upon this to warn off all wanton ears, and careless minds. There is a union between Christ and his church which can only be shadowed out by the union between a husband and his bride: I scarcely dare speak of it in words, it is so holy and divine. It has been said and thought, and I think correctly, that though Adam and Eve fell by the same sin, yet they came to it by different ways. Paul tells us in his epistle to Timothy that "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." She fell by being tempted and misled. But why did Adam eat? Was it not probably from excessive love of the creature, a love of his wife beyond his God: as great a sin as the other, and peradventure more deliberate?

Milton, we believe, was no dreamer when he pictured Adam as meeting Eve after she had eaten the forbidden fruit, and saying to her—

> "I with thee have fix'd my lot,
> Certain to undergo like doom: If death
> Consort with thee, death is to me as life;
> So forcible within my heart I feel
> The bond of Nature draw me to my own;
> My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;
> Our state cannot be sever'd; we are one,
> One flesh. To lose thee were to lose myself."

It was a desperate thing for Adam to do, to disobey his Maker and defy his wrath; but he felt he was so one with her that he would share her destiny. Will you now think of him who is called the Second Adam? He could not sin, nor in any shape or form become partaker with iniquity; but when that church of his, which was his bride, that God had given him to be his for ever, had fallen, he resolved to maintain the bond which bound him to her, and to suffer all the penalties which would inevitably follow.

> "Yea, said the Lord, with her I'll go,
> Through all the depths of pain and woe,
> And on the cross will even dare
> Her bitter cup of death to share."

And so, never polluted, never himself a sinner, yet out of infinite love, that love bottomed upon an eternal, mystical union between himself and his elect, the great Head of the church came and deliberately took our nature and all the consequences of our sin, that he might be one with us for ever. He went down to the depths with us, that he might bring us up into the heights with himself, that there his enthroned bride should be for ever with him, a queen more glorious than eternity had ever seen. The church was taken out of the side of Christ, and in her case it may be fitly said, "The woman is of the man. The man is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man." Christ and his church are no longer twain, but one by a strange, mysterious union which

he thus describes: "I in them, and they in me." Who shall separate what God hath joined together? Now do you wonder that Jesus draweth nigh unto his people? I should marvel if he did not; for would any of us wish to be away when our dear spouse is suffering? When her heart is heavy is not ours heavy too? In a true, conjugal love, such as I trust many of you feel, there is a degree not merely of similarity and of communion, but even of identity between the twain that have become one. Now, we that are joined unto the Lord are one spirit, one by eternal union, and he must, therefore, draw near to us in a way of sympathy and fellowship.

II. I have tried to set forth this mystery as best I can; now I ask your attention for the few minutes that remain to THE WONDER ITSELF. What I have said makes it less surprising, and yet fills us with greater surprise. In one respect it makes it not wonderful, but in others it makes it more wonderful than ever, that God himself in Christ should draw near to us.

In desiring you to notice the wonder itself I would remind you, first, that *by no means is this wonder at all contrary to expectation*, when expectation is founded upon an enlightened understanding. It is natural, it is necessary, that Christ should come near to a people whom he loves so well. Love is attractive. It may be that absence makes the heart grow fonder, but a fond heart hates absence as it hates the fiend; and so the heart of Christ brooks not the absence of the beloved, and will not have it either; for the blood of Christ gives access to Christ, and the heart of Christ out of which that blood comes is never content until there is constant, intimate, unbroken fellowship between the redeemed and the Redeemer. Do you not hear him say, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am"? I say it is a great wonder that God should dwell with men; but it is not a wonder contrary to expectation.

But, dear friends, if you have ever enjoyed this communion, let me help you to describe it, that you may wonder at it. *What is the manner in which God draws near to his people in their time of trouble?* At times he draws near to us by a secret strengthening of us to bear up when we are under pressure. We may have no marked joys, nor special transports; but quiet, calm, subdued joy rules the spirit. To my mind, the best of states is the deep calm which comes of the peace of God which passeth all understanding. I care not so much for your brilliant and gaudy-coloured joys; your neutral tints of quiet joy suit my soul's eye far better. I will not ask to see the sun above me, but I will be content to feel that "underneath are the everlasting arms." Do you not remember that when the burden came you feared it, but did not feel it? for the shoulder had grown stronger: when the need came which you dreaded so terribly, it turned out to be no need at all; for he who refused the meal also removed the hunger, he who denied the garment took away the cold. The secret sustenance of the soul by God is very precious. It is not observed of men, but therein the saints are made to magnify their God. That unseen casting on of oil upon the fire, behind the wall, is what we need, and it is a very charming way of the Lord's drawing near to us in the time of trouble.

urthermore, the good Lord often vouchsafes to his people in their

time of great pain and weakness and weariness a doubly vivid sense of his love. It is not merely that they believe in that love as they find it recorded, though that is a very delightful matter; but they feel this love in the delight of it. They know beyond all doubt, and they feel beyond all question,—"He loved me, and gave himself for me." The alabaster box which they were accustomed to hold firmly in the hand of faith is now broken by love, and poured out by enjoyment, so that the smell which was aforetime latent now perfumes all the soul. It is wonderful what you can bear in suffering, and what you can go through in labour, when "a secret something sweetens all," that secret something the love of God. It is dark, it is very dark. "Nay," saith that inner spirit that dwells behind the eyes, "I see clearly the Lord's wisdom and love even in this dispensation." It is cold and chill. "Nay," saith the soul, "I am warmed and comforted by the love of Jesus; the fire of love burns within me; I am even consumed therewith." Do you know what it is to have the love of God shed abroad in your soul by the Holy Ghost? If so, then you know what it is for God to draw near in the day when you call upon him.

At such times the Lord grants us a sensible assurance of his sympathy with us. We feel that every stroke of the rod comes distinctly from a Father's hand, who doth not afflict willingly. We look up into his face, and feel that like as a father pitieth his children so doth he pity us. We enter into the sorrow of our Father's heart while he is causing us grief, with greater grief to himself. We come to feel what it is to be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord himself. Extraordinary expression, is it not? where one said, "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." We are joined unto the Lord, and know it by feeling his heart beat with our heart. It is a high degree of grace to be so in sympathy with God in his afflicting us that we would not have him cease for our crying; let him continue to do his will even though he cross our wills. Let our vine be pruned, aye, as sharp as may be, till it bleeds again, if the vinedresser sees that thus the clusters will be multiplied. Whenever you come there you have well-nigh reached the end of your chastisement; it has already produced the desired fruit.

The Lord draws near to his people's souls sometimes by a very speedy and remarkable deliverance out of the trouble under which they groan. He can draw near to you when you are plunged in poverty, and he can suddenly lift you to competence. When everything goes against you he can in a moment raise up a friend; when it appears that no chance nor change can set you free he can himself be your deliverer. Did he not bring up Joseph out of the prison-house and set him on the throne of Pharaoh? He can do the like with you if he wills, ere your sun has gone down. Nothing is impossible with God. The deliverances which he has vouchsafed to his people, not only in ancient times, but in modern times, are such as to make us feel we dare not doubt, much less despair. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

I have not quite done; I want you to notice the text again: will you, please? If you will look at it you will notice that in the record there seems to be *some surprise concerning the memorable gracious-*

ness of God. "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee." Then, I suppose, there were other days in which he had not called upon God, or at least had not done so so memorably; but in the first day when I called upon thee thou drewest near to me. Does not that give us a hint, as if he said, "I had neglected my God, I had failed to apply to him; my faith had been asleep, but as soon as ever I awoke the Lord drew near to me." Come ye, then, that have treated the Lord badly; do not stand back through guilty shame. Though ye believe not, he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself. All your sins and all your wanderings have not alienated his great heart from you. Return repentingly and begin again; begin from this day, and you shall find that he will at once bless you.

There seems to me also to be a *Nota Bene* here, a kind of hand in the margin to point out *the promptness of God.* "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee,"—the very day he called God came; no sooner the prayer than the answer. Oh, the blessed quickness of God. When David cried to him he says, "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly, yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind." No pace is too swift for God to come to the deliverance of his people. He is slow to anger, but he is swift in mercy. Try it, ye downcast, and broken-hearted ones, try it to-day, and then come and tell us if it is not so. "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee." I shall expect to see some of you coming forward to join the church, saying, "It was so, sir; I no sooner began to pray than the Lord appeared to me; he brought me up also out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and he hath put a new song into my mouth, and established my goings."

One thing more: observe *the extreme tenderness of all this.* "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee, and saidst, Fear not." You remember that text, "He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not." Here is an illustration of it. Why, I should have thought that when God came near to Jeremiah he would have said to him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" It would have been a very gentle rebuke, but I should have expected as much as that. And if the Lord had come to Jeremiah and said, "You neglected to call upon me, and therefore you fell into this trouble," who would have wondered? But no; the Lord's whole thoughts were about his dear child, and he said nothing to him to wound him, but everything to comfort him. Tenderly he cried, "Fear not!" You mothers leave your children for a little to play together when you are at work in the house, and presently you hear a crash and a cry. One of the children has met with a heavy fall. He was climbing where he ought not to have gone and he has had a serious tumble. One child cries, "Mother, Johnny is killed!" Well, you know if you enquired into the matter you would find that Johnny deserved blame; but you do not enquire. You rush to pick him up; you notice that bruise on his forehead; you are fearful for his legs and arms, you are ready to faint as you notice that he is bleeding. Do you scold him? Ah, no; you fall to kissing the poor child: his fault is passed by, you only think of his pain, your only concern is about himself. And so with our gracious God. He comes to his poor, suffering, downcast people, and

what he says to them is not—"You should not have done so-and-so; this is very wrong of you; I must terribly correct you." No; but he says, "Fear not, I have forgiven thee; and I will deliver thee." Remember the father in the parable when the prodigal came back. Did he lecture him upon his immoralities? Did he say a word about his ingratitude and folly? He did not notice his pimpled face, and point to his blotches as the result of his excess in wine with his riotous companions. He did not point to his rags and tell him that these came of his profligate expenditure. No, he said not a word of upbraiding; but only, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; put a ring on his hands, and shoes on his feet." That is just what the heavenly Father will do and say if we call upon him; therefore let us call upon him in truth from this moment, ere we leave the pew, and may the Lord cause us ere long to say, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee, and thou saidst unto me, Fear not." God bless you dear friends, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
Lamentations iii. 1—33.

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JONAH'S RESOLVE, OR "LOOK AGAIN!"

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 14TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple."—Jonah ii. 4.

WHAT *a complex creature is man!* Those who fancy that they can fully describe him do not understand him. He is a riddle and a contradiction. As says Ralph Erskine—

> "I'm in mine own and others' eyes
> A labyrinth of mysteries."

Here, for instance, is a confession from David. "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand:" (Ps. lxxiii. 22, 23). Paul saith, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord:" (Rom. vii. 24, 25). He is strengthened with all might by the Spirit of God in the inner man, and yet is he weakness itself. In the text Jonah appears to be in a despairing condition,—"I am cast out of thy sight"; and still he has hope, for he resolves, "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." Everything seems lost, and yet as long as a man can look to God nothing is lost. God cannot see him, so he thinks; yet he talks about looking towards God,—this is singular, is it not? It is as if he said, "I am cast out of thy sight, and yet thou art the object of my sight." I do not know of a more gloomy sentence that human lips can speak than this,—"I am cast out of thy sight": I do not know of a more hopeful resolution that the human heart can determine upon than this,—"Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." Oh, untried and inexperienced brother, be not at all disconcerted when you cannot comprehend yourself; on the contrary, take it as one of the evidences that there is a divine life within you when you become a mystery to yourself. If, like a schoolboy, you can draw your own likeness on a slate with a piece of pencil, and can say, "This is all myself," why, then you will be rubbed out, and your image will be forgotten; but an immortal and divinely-inhabited spirit which is to survive sun, moon, and stars is not so readily sketched. While you are brother to the worm, and akin to corruption, you are

nevertheless nearly related to him that sitteth on the eternal throne. Vast regions of wonder-land lie between your condition as the abject prey of death and your portion as an heir of God by Christ Jesus. Manhood is a great deep. I set it not side by side with the fathomless abyss of Godhead, but I know of nothing else which surpasses it.

Our text next leads me to observe that *faith in the child of God, whatever may be his circumstances, still comes to the front.* Here is Jonah in such a wretched condition that he says, "I am cast out of thy sight;" and yet, despite this, he declares, "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." The huge Atlantic wave comes rolling on, it sweeps not only over the feet and breast of faith, but it rises far above her head, and for the moment faith seems to be drowned. Wait an instant, and with her face ruddy from the wave and her locks streaming from the flood, faith lifts up her head again and cries, "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." Write faith's motto,—INVICTA; she ever rides forth upon the white horse, conquering and to conquer. Faith is the child of the Omnipotent, and shares in his omnipotence; it is born of the Eternal, and it possesses his immortality. You may crush and grind it, but every fragment lives; you may cast it into the fire, but it cannot be burned, neither can the smell of fire pass upon it; you may hurl it into the great deeps but it is bound to rise again. Faith has an eye that was made to drink in the sunlight, and so long as God is a sun, there will be eyes of faith to rejoice in him. If we have faith, there is that in us which overcomes the world, baffles Satan, conquers sin, rules life, and abolishes death. All things are possible to him that believeth. Faith triumphs in every place notwithstanding that her life is one of continued trial. Sense is broken like a potter's vessel, and reason is frail as a spider's web; but faith abideth, and groweth, and reigneth in the power of the Most High.

Please observe, for it may be for the comfort of some here present, that Jonah was in a position altogether unique and yet faith stood him in good stead. You have read of Joseph in the dungeon; but his imprisonment was nothing compared with the entombment of Jonah in the belly of a fish. You have read of Job on a dunghill in utter misery,—it is a sorry plight; but there are many Jobs in one Jonah if we reckon by present misery and distress. To lie as a living man in a living sepulchre was horrible. Jonah, no doubt, suffered from those inconveniences which, apart from miracle, would have ended his life right speedily. A dark, stifling, pestilential cell would have been preferable to the maw of a shark, or whatever great fish it may have been which had swallowed him. The singular thing of it is that he was aware of his position, and knew when the monster dived into the sea-bottom, when it passed through a meadow of sea-weed, when it neared some great mountain, and when again it rose to the surface. This makes the miracle all the more striking; for one is apt to imagine that the man must have lain dormant, or at least must, in a measure, have been unconscious while in such singular hiding. His position was such as never mortal man had known before or since. Now, it sometimes happens that singularity gives a sting to sorrow. When a man believes that nobody ever suffered as he is doing, he concludes his case

to be well-nigh hopeless. Dear tried friend, you cannot say this with any certainty, I am sure; for you have comrades with you in your every grief; but Jonah could say it with absolute truthfulness: he was where never man had been before, and where never man has been since, to be alive. His trial was all his own; no stranger intermeddled in it: in his affliction he had no predecessor, and no successor; he was the first and the last that for three days and nights had dwelt in the belly of a fish. He was singular to the last degree, and yet—here is the blessedness of it—his faith was equal to his position. You cannot banish faith, her home is everywhere. You have seen upon the Manx penny the three legs which must always stand, turn the coin whichever way you please: such is faith,—throw it wherever you may, it always falls on its feet. If faith be in a little child, it gives the child wisdom beyond its years; if it be in a decrepit old man, it makes him strong out of feebleness; if it be faith in solitude, it blesses a man with the best of company; if it be faith in the midst of adversaries, it brings to a man the best of friends. Faith in weakness makes us strong, in poverty makes us rich, and in death makes us live. Get a firm confidence in God, and you need not enquire what is going to happen,—all must be well with you. Winding or straight, up hill or down dale, or through the fire or through the sea, if thou believest, thy road is the King's highway. If faith does not fail, nothing fails. Faith arms a man from head to foot with mail through which neither sword, nor spear, nor poisoned arrow can ever pierce. Though it be forged upon the anvil of the devil's greatest subtlety, no weapon can prosper against thee, O true believer! Thou art as safe as he in whom thou believest; for "he shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust. His truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

If I might at this time help any child of God who is in trouble into a solid rest in God, I should be indeed delighted. Oh that the ever blessed Spirit would help me to that end!

Carefully note, first, *the verdict of sense*—"I am cast out of thy sight"; and, secondly, *the resolve of faith*—"Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." These, remember, were both found in one man at one time.

I. First, here is THE VERDICT OF SENSE.

Please notice that *it comes first in the text.* Sense hurriedly decides, "I am cast out of thy sight." It is noteworthy that unbelief is always first to speak. Whenever David observes, "I said in my haste," you will notice that something is to be confessed which was unwise and untrue. Unbelief cannot wait, it must have its say; it blabs out all its silly soul at its earliest opportunity. In your own case, if you can be calm and patient you will speak to God's glory; but if you are hasty and petulant, and must needs talk as soon as ever the trial comes upon you, it is almost an absolute certainty that you will say what you will be glad to unsay. Our hasty words are often dipped in wormwood and handed back to us that we may eat them. Hold thee still a while, my brother, or, if thou must speak, speak to thy God and not against him; speak to thy God and not to thyself. Soliloquies are frequently an increase of woe. The heart ferments and heats itself, creating an inward fever which parches the soul. If a vessel wanteth vent it is not helped by

being stirred within itself; yet such is the case when we say with David, "I pour out my soul in me." Better is that word, "Ye people, pour out your heart before him," even before the living God. Brother, speak thou not to thyself, lest thou seem to be a madman: thou mayest vex thy soul exceedingly by those lone maunderings; speak thou to thy God. Even if thou utter hasty words, and words of unbelief, they are better uttered in his presence than muttered within thine own heart. He will hear them in any case; but when he perceives that in thy spirit there is no guile, though much impatience, he will freely forgive thee all thy childish error of too hasty speech, and help thee to bear up under thy woe. Speak, for silence slays; but speak to God, for he is full of compassion. Take the warning of the text, however, and be slow to murmur, remembering that the carnal nature is ever swift to speak and sure to speak amiss.

This verdict of sense, in the next place, *was apparently very correct.* "I said, I am cast out of thy sight." Did it not seem so? Jonah had tried to get away from God, and God had pursued him with a tempest, and almost broken the ship to pieces in order to be at him. As the result of the tempest he had been hurled into the sea, and in the sea a great fish had swallowed him, and he had been carried down till the floods compassed him about. Did not all his surroundings confirm his suspicion that he was a castaway? Could he expect ever again that the word of the Lord would come to Jonah the son of Amittai? Could he hope ever again to stand with the joyful multitude that kept holy day in the courts of the Lord's house, or to present his sacrifice of thanksgiving upon Jehovah's altar? No; if he judged by his feelings, he was shut up to the conclusion which he expressed. There remained nothing to him but bare life, and that in such a condition that one could hardly desire to have it continued. He reckoned with abundant show of reason that he must be cast out of God's sight. Yet it was not so; and therefore I invite those of you who have begun to judge your God by what you feel, and by what you see, to revise your judgment, and in future to be very diffident as to your power to come to any just conclusion as to God's dealings with you. Thank God, you will be wrong if you despair. It is much better for you to show your faith by relying on your God than to display your folly by saying, "I am cast out."

As this verdict of sense seemed to be correct, Jonah must have felt that *it was assuredly deserved.* If the Lord had dealt with Jonah according to his sins, he would have been a castaway. He had hurried to Joppa, and taken a passage in a ship to go to Tarshish, or anywhere else, to flee from the presence of God. Now, what was a fitter punishment for him than that he should be cast out from the sight of God? Had not this been his inquiry at Joppa, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?" Was not this his demand, "Whither shall I flee from thy presence?" Now, he has his answer,—he is carried down till the depth closed him round about. His waywardness had come home to him: he had been paid in his own coin; and what could Jonah feel but that he was filled with his own ways? Had he died in the sea he could not have doubted the Lord's justice. If he had been driven away as an outcast, it had but been righteous retribution to a runaway who refused his Master's service. This must have made him doubly sorrowful; a guilty

conscience is the sourest ingredient of all. When each wave howled in Jonah's ear, "You deserve it," he was in an evil plight indeed.

One sharp part of Jonah's misery was that *God's hand was so evidently in his misery.* He sees it and trembles. Observe how he ascribes all to God,—"*Thou* hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about; all *thy* billows and *thy* waves passed over me." We can bear a blow from an enemy, but a wound from our best friend is hard. If the Lord himself go forth against us, the war is one to tremble at. If the messenger of grief be commissioned by Jehovah himself, and we know it, mere carnal reason concludes that all is over finally, and that henceforth all we can do is to sit down and die. Faith thinketh not so; but this is after the manner of flesh and sense.

Observe that this verdict of sense, "I am cast out from God," *was very bitter to Jonah.* You can see by the way in which he speaks that it is a heavy burden to him, and yet it seems strange that it should be so. Here is a man who, when he was in a wrong state of heart, sought to flee from the presence of the Lord, and therefore went to the sea-coast on purpose, rejoiced to find a ship bound for a distant and almost unknown land, and paid the fare to sail therein of set purpose that he might get away from God; and now that he thinks he is away from God, he is filled with horror and dismay. By this we know the children of God even at their worst estate. Oh, you that are the people of God, you may sometimes in your wilfulness wish that you could get away from the all-searching eye; but if you could do so it would be hell to you. If you are a child of God you must dwell in the presence of God; it is your life, and you cannot be happy anywhere else. Oh, redeemed, regenerate man, it is impossible now for thy once renewed spirit ever to be happy in the beggarly elements of thy former condition: except in the divine atmosphere of heavenly love there is no rest for thee. Thou art spoilt for this world, O heir of the world to come! There was a time when its dainties would have been sweet to thy taste, and thy soul could have been filled therewith; but that day is over now: thou must eat the bread of heaven or starve. If thou art not happy in thy God thou art doomed to be happy nowhere. There is no choice left for thee. Thy very nature is so affected now that as the needle rests not save as it points to the pole, so can thy heart never be quiet except in Jesus. The light of his countenance must be light to thee, or thou must walk in darkness; thy music must come from Jesus' lips, or else there is nought for thee but wailing and gnashing of teeth; thy heaven must be in his embrace, there is no heaven elsewhere for thee. Nor would we wish to have it different. I am sure I can say from my very soul that if God could leave me it would be to me a hell worse than Dante or Milton could imagine. What if I still had to pursue my holy calling, and to preach! What woe to preach without him! What a hollow mockery! If I were bound to continue still the outward form of prayer and of a moral life, what vanity of vanities would it all be without my Lord! Without God! brothers, sisters, can you bear the thought? It is not the pang of hell, nor its fires, nor its undying worm, nor aught else that can be pictured of amazing terror that causes such alarm as the bare thought of being severed from God. To be cast out

from his sight were hell indeed! Now, I should think that if Jonah had been in a calm state of mind, and had been able to consider things in the light of truth, it ought to have given him some ground of hope that he was not cast out from God after all, because he was so unhappy at the idea of being so cast out. Will the Lord leave a soul that is distressed by such leaving? No spirit is wholly cast off from God if it longs after God. If thou canst be content without God thou art indeed a lost one; but if there be in thee a wretched rankling discontent at the very thought of being severed from thy God, then thou art his, and he is thine, and no eternal division shall come between thee and him.

Thus I have brought out somewhat the force of this verdict of sense, —"I am cast out of thy sight"; but I want you further to notice that *it was not true*. There was ground for grief, but not for this despairing inference. The verdict was not sustained by sufficient evidence. It was a great deal more than Jonah should have said, "I am cast out of thy sight." What, alive in the sea, Jonah; alive in the deep! alive in the belly of a fish! and say that you are cast out from God's sight! Surely if God was anywhere in the world, it was in that great fish. Where else could there have been surer proofs of his present power and Godhead than in keeping a man alive in a living charnel? There was a constant standing miracle for three days and nights; and where there is a miracle, there is God most visibly seen. If Jonah could have asked the seas and asked the deep places of the earth, they would have told him that the Lord was not far away. If he could have asked the fish itself, it would have owned that God was there. If those who go down to the sea in ships see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep, much more might he have seen them who went into the sea in a fish's belly. There is a text that Jonah could never have heard, which I commend to you against the time when you get to be where Jonah was. I do not suppose you ever will be buried alive in a fish literally; but you may spiritually sink as deep as the prophet did. What is that text? "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Jonah said, "I am cast out": but that was not true. Poor Jonah! the mariners cast him out, but God did not; he was cast out of the ship, but not out of the sight of God. The Lord of old was faithful, and it was his rule never to cast away his people; even as David saith, "For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies." Mark the text I quoted from our Lord's own lips: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Never question this sacred word. He will never, never cast out a single one that trusts him. So that if ever you should be in a condition which seems to you quite as forlorn as that of this prophet in the midst of the sea, you may yet be sure that you are not cast off, nor cast out. He who says he is cast out, says more than can possibly be true; since the infallible promise is, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." It is not for us to forge a lie against the God of the whole earth. He does not speak that which is false, but out of his mouth proceedeth verity. Even if all things in earth and hell should swear that the Lord has cast away one of his own believing people, it will be our duty to disbelieve them all; for it is impossible that he should cast out any believer, in any wise, for any reason or motive whatsoever.

II. Follow me, dear friends, and may the Lord make it profitable to you, while I dwell during the rest of my time upon THE RESOLVE OF FAITH. Oh that the Holy Ghost may work in us "like precious faith" with Jonah. "Yet," says Jonah, "even if I be cast out, yet I will look again toward thy holy temple."

Jonah was a man of God when he was in his worst state of mind; at no time was the eternal life quite extinct within him. An ugly kind of saint this Jonah, when he was in the sulks! A proud, self-conscious, wilful, and morose being, hard to love! Yet, as an oyster may bear a precious pearl within its rough shell, so did the harsh prophet contain, within his being, a priceless jewel of faith—faith eminent, prevalent, triumphant, faith of the highest degree.

This faith put him upon prayer. The chapter begins, "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly." Jonah had not prayed when he went down to Joppa. He had taken the management of himself into his own hands, and referred nothing to God as to that rash voyage. How could he pray in such a temper? He paid his fare to go to Tarshish; he did not pray God's blessing on that expenditure, I am quite sure. When the sea began to work, and was tempestuous, he was in the sides of the ship, but he did not pray; no, he went to sleep. His conscience had become stupid, and seared as with a hot iron; there was no prayer in him, but a certain numbness of mind and lethargy of heart. And now he gets into the fish's belly, a very close, dead place, where one would think he would lie in a state of coma, or in a sort of fainting fit, if it were possible for him to live at all; yet there he begins to pray. You will find God's children praying where you thought they would despair; and, on the other hand, you may discover that they do not pray where you thought they would abound in supplication. "Oh," says one man, "if I could have my time all to myself, and had not the worry of this family and this business, what a deal of time I would spend in prayer!" Would you? I would not guarantee your abundant devotion. Some of those who have least time for prayer pray most, and those who have most opportunity and everything congenial, are too often found to be most slack in their petitions. Jonah's oratory was narrow, and this pressed the prayer out of him. He did not pray in the sides of the ship, where he had room enough and to spare; but he prayed where he could not get upon his knees, or hear his own voice. Laid out in his living coffin, he began his pleadings. One would think it hard to make the belly of hell the gate of heaven, but Jonah did so. He prays, and one of the surest evidences of a living faith is prayer. If thou canst not do anything else, thou canst pray, and if thou be a child of God thou wilt as surely pray as a man breathes or as a child cries: thou canst not help it. Prayer is thy vital breath, thy native air. Whether on the land or in the sea, prayer is thy life, and thou canst not exist without it if thou be indeed born from on high. Answer, dear hearer, is it not so? It is not the prayer-*book*, but the prayer-*faith* that we must have. Hast thou such faith?

I beg you to notice, however, that this faith of Jonah showed itself not in prayer to God in general, but the passage runs, "Then Jonah prayed *unto the Lord* HIS *God*." There is a mint of meaning here!

If you go upstairs and pray to God, as everybody's God, you have done what every Jack, Tom, and Harry may do; but to go to your closet and cry to the Lord as your own God, is what none but an heir of grace can do. Oh to cry—"My Father and my Friend! My God in covenant. My God to whom I have spoken years ago, and from whom I have heard full many a time. Thou whom I love. Thou who lovest me, Jehovah, my God." This laying hold upon God as our own God is a business which the outer-court worshipper knows nothing of. Have some of you got a God at all? "Oh," you say, "I know there is a God." Yes, I know there is a bank; but that does not make me rich. What is your God to me? I want to say "my God," or I cannot be happy. Have you a God to yourself, all to yourself; for if it be so, you will pray the prayer of faith when you draw near to him, and this will prove that whatever your condition may be, you are not cast out from the sight of the Most High.

There is one thing about Jonah I want you particularly to notice, that as his faith made him pray, and made him pray to the Lord his God, *his faith made him deal familiarly with holy Scripture.* "What!" say you: "how know you that?" He had but a small Bible compared with ours, but he had laid much of it up in his memory. Evidently he loved the Book of Psalms, for his prayer is full of David's expressions. Kindly look at Jonah's prayer. I think I am right in saying that there are no less than seven extracts from the Psalms in that prayer and its preface. It was Jonah's own prayer, and no man compiled it for him, for he was far away from the haunts of men; yet his heart led him to his former readings, and his memory came to his aid with expressions most suitable, and forcible, borrowed from a former much tried servant of the Lord. A deep experience is bound to resort to Scripture for its expression. Human compositions suffice for surface work, but when all God's waves and billows have gone over us, we quote a Psalm. When our soul fainteth within us, we are not to be revived by human songs, but we turn to the grave sweet melodies of inspiration. When a true child of God is in trouble, it is wonderful how dear the Bible becomes to him,—aye, the very words of it. I say ,the very words of it; for I care nothing about the scorn which attaches to a belief in "Verbal Inspiration." If the words are not inspired, neither is the sense, since there can be no sense apart from the words. My soul doth know what it is to hang her hope upon a single word of God; and to find her trust accepted. I would not even change the expression of our translation in many a place: not that I am bound by a translation, for God's original is that which we accept as infallible; but yet there are translations which are evidently accurate, for the Lord's own Spirit has made them unutterably dear to his saints. There are circumstances connected with the very words of many a text, and with God's dealing with us through those words, and in such instances we cling even to the English text with all our might. I think you will find that tried saints are the most biblical saints. In summer weather we delight in hymns, but in winter's storms we fly to psalms. Your frothy professors quote Dickens or George Eliot, but God's afflicted quote David or Job. Those Psalms are marvellous. David seems to have lived for us all: he was not so much one man as all men in one. Somewhere or other, the great circle of his experience touches yours and mine,

and the Holy Ghost by David has furnished us with the best expressions which we can utter before the Lord in prayer. Give me the faith which loves the Scriptures. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, and true faith always loves the Word from which it sprang; it feeds thereon, and grows thereby. In proportion as people begin to criticize the Scriptures, and to doubt the authenticity of this and that, in that proportion they move out of the latitude of faith: the region of criticism is cold as the polar seas; faith loves a warmer atmosphere. The faith of God's elect clings to God and reverences his word. By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God shall man live, and upon such meat Jonah lived where others must have died.

I desire to come close up to my text, while I bid you note that *faith dares come to God with a "yet."* Jonah said, "Yet I will look again toward thy holy temple." Faith in her worst circumstances trusts to God. Clog her, load her, shut her up, yet she looks to God alone. O God, I trusted thee once when I was but young, and I felt my need of a Saviour; I came to thee then and I looked to Jesus, and I found peace at once; but then I did not know the evil of sin as I know it now. What then? Why, with this new knowledge yet will I look to Jesus. I did not know then the depravity of my heart as I know it now, but yet with this fresh sense of guilt I will look as at the first. I did not know then thy great and exceeding wrath against sin as I know it now; but yet with this fuller discovery I will look to thee. I did not know the burden of life then as I know it now; I did not know the power of Satan over me then as I know it now; yet will I look again unto thy holy temple. With all these new weights and fresh incumbrances I do to-day what I did many years ago; I throw myself on thee, my Lord, and trust in thy matchless plan of salvation through the precious blood of Christ. It charmed me once, it charms me yet again. This is the perseverance and determination of faith. She overleaps all walls, and dashes through all hedges with her "yet." Come what may, she has looked to Christ, and she means to do so whatever may arise to suggest some other course.

According to the Hebrew, the word should be rendered "only" instead of "yet,"—"only I will look again toward thy holy temple." *Faith looks to God only.* Faith comes alone to her God, and seeks no company to keep her in countenance. When we were first saved it was by faith only, and we must be saved in the same way still. In Jonah's case all props were knocked away; he had nothing to look to in the whale's belly at the bottom of the sea; but then and there he trusted God, and that was all. He could not think very clearly, nor confess before men, neither could he be or do anything; for he was packed away in quarters too close for action; but he could look again towards the temple of God, and this alone he did. He could give the faith-look when all looking with the eyes was far out of the question. How could he tell in which direction to look for the temple when all around him rolled the dark sea? His look was inward and spiritual, and he was content to do that, and that only. His state was looking, looking—only looking. Be it ours to believe, to believe, and yet again to believe. Jonah looked again to the place where God revealed himself, and we look to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He looked to the

mercy-seat sprinkled with the blood of sacrifice, where the Lord was wont to pardon and bless all suppliant sinners, and we also look to Jesus as the great Propitiation. To this look we will add nothing as a ground of trust. Jesus only is our hope, and only will we look to him. We will add nothing to our look, our look to Christ; he alone is our stay and our comfort. It is a blessed thing to get clear of all secondary hopes, and to live by faith alone. Mixtures will not do in the hour of trial. A single eye is what is needed: the least division in your trust is painful and dangerous. If you have lost some of your first light, look again; look toward his holy temple at once, and the light shall surely return to you.

Do you notice here that *faith is driven to do according to her first acts*—"Yet I will look again." You know faith is described in other ways beside looking; it is taking, grasping, possessing, feeding; but faith first of all is looking; and so, whenever you fall into grievous trouble, it will be wise to resort to the beginning of your confidence, and hold it fast to the end. If you cannot grasp, yet look. There are several grades of faith; and when you cannot reach the higher grade it will be wise to enter fully into the lower one. Remember, the lowest form of faith will save, and even the smallest measure of faith is effectual for salvation, though not for consolation. Look! Look to Jesus! "There is life in a look." There is heaven in a look. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Look! If thou canst not go forth to fight by faith, stand still and look by faith. If thou canst not declare the glory of the Lord, yet look. If thou canst not tell what God *hath* done for thee, yet keep thou still looking by faith to see what God *will* do for thee. Do thou thy first work, and as thy first work was a simple look at the Crucified One, look again to him.

With this I shall close, urging dear friends here present, even if they forget all the rest of my text, to remember those two words, "*Look again.*" If any of you are in sore trouble, I will bid you go home with only these two words ringing in your ears, "Look again!" If you did look once, but have fallen into new darkness, *look again.* I mean this morning, and I would ask you to follow me in it, to look to my Lord Jesus Christ again as I did at the first. It is frequently a great benefit to overhaul the foundations and begin again at the beginnings. I did look to Christ three and thirty years ago, or more; so did some of you. But the devil may say, "Your faith was fancy; your conversion was a delusion." Be it so, O Satan; we will not dispute with you, but we will begin again from this moment. It is such a mercy that faith does not need to grow old before it saves us: the faith born this moment saves the soul in its very birth. Is it so, that your faith is not more than five minutes old, my brother? Have you only just begun to trust Christ? Well, thy faith hath saved thee quite as effectually as the faith of a man who has believed in Christ for fifty years. We must believe anew each day; yesterday's believing will not do for to-day. Let us now look to Jesus Christ upon the cross, and trust him this morning as if we never trusted him before. "I will look again toward thy holy temple." It will do each man good to look anew to that cross which is the sole hope of his soul. There is nothing more sweetening to the spirit than to confess sin and

accept mercy in the original style, and to go to Jesus anew just as we went at first. Let us do so at this moment.

A person proudly said the other day that he could no longer sing,—

> "I'm a poor sinner, and nothing at all,
> But Jesus Christ is my all in all."

He had got beyond that! Highty tighty, here's a fine fellow! He has just risen from the dunghill, and is come to be a grand gentleman all at once! Nothing will do for him but—

> "See the conquering hero comes,
> Sound the trumpets; beat the drums."

Alas, for the top-lofty hypocrite! Shame on the proud self-magnifier! If he did but know himself he would confess his nothingness with a deeper emphasis than ever, and he would, like the publican, cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." I believe that as a child of God grows in sanctification he deepens in humility, and as he advances to perfection he sinks in his own esteem. Oh that men would give over that bladder-blowing which seems to be so much admired in certain quarters! We have had much occasion to mourn over the lower life of some professors; but the higher life of others is not a bit better; it is false, proud, censorious, and unpractical. Those who boast of perfection will have much to grieve over when once they come to their senses, and stand in truth before the living God. No man talks of living without sin till he is taken in the net of self-deception. I have walked with God for many years, and enjoyed the light of his countenance, but my experience is that I am this day obliged to take a far lower place before him than ever I took before, while—

> "Less than nothing I can boast,
> And vanity confess."

Brethren, whether *you* will do so or not, I flee to the cross again. In the Rock of Ages I again hide myself. Who among us dares to come forth from that divine shelter? "Jesus, lover of our soul, let us to thy bosom fly." Let all of us sing as though it were for the first time—

> "Just as I am—without one plea
> But that thy blood was shed for me,
> And that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
> O Lamb of God, I come."

Dear friends, it is due to God, it is due to Christ, it is due to the gospel, that we should every day believe with like simplicity of undivided trust. Keep on believing in Christ, "to whom coming as unto a living stone." We are to live by faith. You may be quite sure that you are permitted to do this, for Christ is always a sinner's Saviour. If you cannot come to him as saints, come to him as sinners. If your unfitness for fellowship as a servant comes before your mind and breaks your heart, yet remember that you may always return as a prodigal son. If you cannot feed in green pastures as sheep of the fold, yet yield to the strong hand of him who seeketh the lost sheep. If you cannot come to Jesus as you should, yet come just as you are. If your garments are not clean,

as they should be, yet come and wash them white in the blood of the Lamb.

This ought to be done more readily by us every day, for it should be a growingly easy thing to believe our God as experience proves his faithfulness. When we are at our worst let us trust with unshaking faith. Recollect that then is the time when we can most glorify God by faith. To trust Christ when thou hast a shallow sense of sin, when thy heart is glad and thy face is bright, is but a slender trusting him ; but to believe that he can cleanse thee when thy heart is black as hell, when thou canst not see one good trait in all thy character, when thou seest nothing but fault and imperfection about thine entire life, when all thine outward circumstances seem to speak of an angry God, and all thine inward feelings threaten thee with doom from his right hand,—this is to believe indeed. Such faith the Lord deserves of thee. Oh, if thou be only a little sinner, a little Saviour and a little faith may serve thy turn; if thou hast but little fear, and a little burden, and little care, and little need, why then thou canst not greatly prove or trust thy Lord. But if thou be up to thy neck in sorrow, aye, if thou be drowned in it, as Jonah was, and be driven well nigh to despair, then thou hast a great God, and thou shouldst glorify him by greatly trusting him. If thou be tempted to lay violent hands upon thyself, or to do some other rash and evil deed, do thou no such thing, but trust thyself with thy God, and this will give him more glory than seraphim and cherubim can do. To believe in the promise of God, as you read it in his word, is a grand thing. To believe it, though you are sick and sorry, though ready to die, this is to glorify the Lord. Brethren, if I live I will believe the promise, if I die I will believe the promise, and when I rise again I will believe the promise. Let us resolve to believe though the world be in flames, and the pillars thereof are removed. Let us believe though the sun be turned into darkness and the moon into blood. Let us believe though all the powers of the earth be marshalled in fight, and Gog and Magog gather themselves together to battle. Let us believe though the trumpet sounds for judgment, and the great white throne is set in the open heaven! Wherefore should we doubt ? The covenant confirmed by promise and by oath, and ratified with the blood of Jesus, places every believer under the broad shield of divine truth ; and what cause can there be for fear? O my hearer, believest thou in Christ? Dost thou trust thy God ? If thou canst stand to that, thou art not only a saved man, but thou already givest glory to God. So may he help thee to do. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jonah i. ii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—90, 598, 533

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

COMMENDATION FOR THE STEADFAST.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."—Revelation iii. 8, 10.

THIS is a message to the angel of the church at Philadelphia, and it is full of instruction to churches and ministers at this present time. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." The Philadelphian church was not great, but it was good; it was not powerful, but it was faithful. The Spirit says, "Thou hast a little strength." Every band of believers has some strength: weak as we are in ourselves, the very fact of our possessing faith proves that we have a portion of strength. Still that strength is a matter of degrees; and certain churches have a little strength—but only a little. I suppose that the Philadelphian church had but little strength in the following respects:—the number of its members would be small, and it had therefore but little strength for undertaking any extensive enterprize which would call for numerous bands of workers. The brethren needed all their strength concentrated on their home work, for they were few, and the miss of one or two from home evangelization and edification would be greatly felt. A church may have a very short muster-roll, and yet it may be very dear to God, who thinks more of quality than of quantity, more of obedience than of numbers. They had also little strength in the direction of talent. They were not like that famous church at Corinth, where everybody could teach everybody, but where nobody cared to learn of any one. They had but small ability to speak with tongues, or work miracles, or teach the word; but they adhered faithfully to what they had been taught by the apostles of the Lord: they were not brilliant, but they were sound. Churches with few men of learning or eloquence in them may yet be greatly approved of the Lord, who cares more for grace than learning, more for faith than talent. In all probability they were, like most of the churches of that day, possessed of very little pecuniary strength.

They could do but little where money would be required. They were a company of poor people with no man of means among them; and there are many such churches that are peculiarly precious to the heart of God, who cares nothing for gold, and everything for sincerity. Possibly they were little, too, in those things which go side by side with grace: I mean in knowledge, and in power to utter what they knew. This was a pity; but as it was their misfortune and not their fault, they were not blamed for it. The Lord does not blame us for having little strength, but for having little love, little faith, little zeal, little consecration.

The Philadelphian saints, like the limpet, which has but little strength, stuck firmly to the rock, and they are commended for it. They had little strength, but they kept God's word, and they did not deny his name. Possibly if they had felt stronger they might have presumptuously quitted the word of the Lord for the opinions of men, as the Galatians did, and then they would have lost their reward. May every church of the Lord Jesus Christ, whether it have little strength or much, be concerned to be steadfast in the faith—loyal to King Jesus—firm in the truths which Christ has taught us by the Holy Ghost.

But, dear friends, as this expression was used to the angel of the church at Philadelphia, whom I suppose to be the minister of the church, I do not feel that I shall be doing any violence to the text if I take it in reference to each individual; and I have no doubt that there will be individual Christians present at this time who, though they have but little strength, have kept God's word. If so, they will receive a reward for it, according to the grace of God. They have been firm and steadfast in their confession of the faith once delivered unto the saints, and the Lord who gave them the grace to be so will give them yet more grace as the recompense of their fidelity. We will speak upon the text to-night with a view to that, and we shall notice, first, that there is *a word of praise:* God praises this faithful messenger of the church. Secondly, he gives him *a word of prospect.* He says, "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word." And then, thirdly, we shall speak upon *a word of promise* which is in the text in the tenth verse: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Oh that my words might call out some faithful ones in these evil days. We need pillars in the house of our God. Where are they to be found?

I. First I would remind you that our text has in it A WORD OF PRAISE.

I do not think that we should be so slow as we sometimes are in praising one another. There is a general theory abroad that it is quite right and proper to point out to a brother all his imperfections, for it will be a salutary medicine to him, and prevent his being too happy in this vale of tears. Is it supposed that we shall cheer him on to do better by always finding fault with him? If so, some people ought to be very good by this time, for they have had candid friends in plenty. Find fault with a brother and he will be kept from growing too proud; and he will, no doubt, go forward blessing you very much for your

kind consideration in promoting his humility. Remember also that it is so much to the increase of brotherly love to have a clear eye to see the imperfections of our friends. Does anyone in his senses think so? I should suppose that after having given a sufficient trial to that manner of procedure, it would be quite as well at times to try another, and to rejoice in everything which we see of grace in our brethren, and sometimes to thank God in their hearing for what we perceive in them that we are sure is the fruit of the Spirit. If they are what they should be, they will not think so much of our little praises as to be unduly exalted thereby; but they will be sometimes so encouraged as to be nerved to higher and nobler things. If a man deserves my commendation, I am only paying a debt when I give it to him, and it is dishonest to withhold it under the pretence that he would not use the payment rightly. Men who deserve praise can bear it, and some of them even need it. I should not wonder that the kindly words of God's people may be but a rehearsal of that "Well done, good and faithful servant" which will one day sound in their ears; and be a useful rehearsal, too, helping them on their weary way. Good men have many conflicts, let us minister to their comfort. At any rate, the great Head of the church did not think it unwise to say to the church at Philadelphia that he thought well of it because it had kept his word. Let us give honour to whom honour is due, and encourage those who are aiming to do right.

What had these Philadelphian believers done that they should be praised? What they did was this—they kept the word of God: "Thou hast kept my word, and thou hast not denied my name." What does this mean?

Does it not mean, first, that *they had received the word of God;* for if they had not heard it and held it they could not have kept it. It was theirs, they heard it and had no wish to hear anything else. It was theirs, they read it and searched it and made it their own. They hoarded up divine knowledge in their memories, preserved it in their affections, used it in their experience, and practised it in their lives. They were not ashamed of revealed truth, but, on the contrary, they took it for their possession, their heritage, their treasure, their all. I trust that many of us can say that the doctrines of grace are our jewels, our estate, yea, our very life. God has put us in trust with the gospel, and we will sooner part with all that we have than be false to our trust. It is no small privilege so to be taught of the Holy Ghost as to have a taste for the gospel, a deep attachment to the truths of the covenant.

Next, we may be sure that *they loved the word of God.* They had an intense delight in it. They appreciated it: they fed upon it. They stored it up as bees store away honey, and they were as ready to defend it as bees are to guard their stores. They meditated upon it; they sought to understand it; they took delight in everything which came from the mouth of God. Men do not keep things which they consider to be valueless: if men in our day had a higher opinion of the truth they would be more valiant for it. People are always ready to part with that for which they have no esteem, and for this very reason many are quite willing to give up the Bible to critics and philosophers, those footpads and burglars of faith. But he that keeps God's word, we may be sure, is deeply in

love with it. Oh, dear child of God, you may be very little in Israel; but if you love the word of God there is a something about you in which God takes delight. He sees you at your Bible-reading, he marks you in your endeavours to get at the meaning of his word, he notes you when you sit down and meditate upon his divine thoughts, and he takes pleasure in your eagerness to know what the will of the Lord is. He says, "I know thy works"; and though you may be one of little influence and little ability, yet he is pleased with you because you are pleased with his word.

More, however, is meant than simply loving the word, though that is no small thing. It means that *they believed it*, believed it most thoroughly, and so kept it. I am afraid that there are great truths in God's word which we do not intelligently believe, but take for granted. We say, "Yes, yes; these doctrines are in the Creed;" and we put them up on the top shelf, and by that very act we lay them aside and do not heartily believe in them for ourselves. We grow very vexed if anybody denies them; but if there is no controversy over them we forget them. Is this wise? We call our opponents heterodox, and our zeal for orthodoxy comes to the front; and yet, after all, it may be that we have never exercised a personal faith about those doctrines, so as to think them out for ourselves. It is a grand thing to work your passage to a truth, to mine your way to the golden ore by digging and clearing. True believers may be likened to those mites in the cheese which eat their way into it, and penetrate into the centre by feeding upon all that lies in their way as they advance. We eat our way into the word of God, we live upon what we learn, tunnelling through the truth with receptive minds. The truth is too great for us ever to absorb it all, but daily and hourly we live upon it. We so believe it, as to treat it as a matter of fact, valuable for everyday use: this is the surest way to keep it, even to the end. Now, dear child of God, as I have said before, you may have but very little strength, you may often be tempted and tried, and cast down; but if you believe the word, there is more for the pleasing of God in a childlike faith than there is in the most glittering profession or in the most showy deeds. Faith is the Koh-i-noor among jewels,—the queen of the virtues. Believe you God's word, and you have wrought a god-like work. Believe it when others contradict it, and you are a conqueror over them all. Believe it when circumstances seem to make it questionable; believe it when your own heart fails you; believe it when your sin and corruption rise within you like a fountain of foul waters: thus shall you give glory to the God of truth. Still hold on to the promise made to you in the word of God, and to the manifestation of God which is seen in Christ Jesus, and you will be doing your God the honour which he deserves at your hands, and he will say, "I know thy works; for thou hast a little strength, but thou hast kept my word."

Furthermore, in addition to the inner possession and the hearty belief of the truth, we must be *ready to adhere to it at all times*. That, perhaps, is the central thought here,—"Thou hast kept my word." Why, there are great folk among us that never care to believe according to God's word at all. They have thought out what they believe; their theology is made out of their own substance, as spiders spin their webs out of

their own bowels. But, surely, in everything which concerns the doctrines of our most holy faith, we must make reference to a "Thus, saith the Lord." It is not what I think; it is not what some greater man may think; it is not what may be the consensus of all the enlightened minds of the period: the decision lies with what the Lord has spoken. God's thoughts are as high above ours as the heavens are above the earth; dare we drag them down and sit in judgment on them? If the thought of the age happens to be right, well and good; but it is not upon temporary opinion that we rest. Our faith stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. What is taught in Holy Scripture is sure truth to us, and every other statement must bow to it. Chillingworth said what ought to be true, though I am afraid that it is not—"The Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants." I should like to see a few more of such Protestants. Many say that we ought to keep "abreast of the times," whatever that may mean; and that there is a certain "spirit of the age," to which we should be subject. This to me is treason against sovereign truth. I know of one only spirit to whom I desire to be subject, and that is the Spirit of all the ages, who never changes. By his teaching we are not only nineteen centuries behind the present age, but we come in at the back of all the ages of human history. If we have but little strength, we mean to let the times and the spirits go where they like, we shall keep to the Holy Spirit and to his eternal teachings. Supposing that we have not such big heads as some have, and cannot excogitate or multiply sophisms and inventions as they do, it will be no small thing to be commended at the last, in these terms—"Thou hast a little strength, but thou hast kept my word." Brother, cling to God's word; cling to infallible and immutable revelation! Whatever novelty comes up, keep to the word of Jesus! Whatever discovery may be made by the wise men of the age, let Christ be wisdom unto you. Regard the new teachers no more than you would the wise men of Gotham, for those who oppose themselves to God's word are fools. Let them cry "Lo here, or lo there," but believe them not. Here is your anchorage. The Book is our ultimatum.

> "Within this sacred volume lies
> The mystery of mysteries;
> Happiest they of human race
> To whom our God hath given grace
> To read, to mark, to think, to pray,
> To know the right, to learn the way;
> But better they had ne'er been born
> Who read to doubt, or read to scorn."

That which is not in Holy Scripture is not to be received as matter of faith in the Christian church; but that which is there is to be received and held with that stern steadfastness, that incorruptible faith, which no more changes than the unchanging truth which it has grasped. Woe be to the man who is first a Calvinist, then an Arminian, then a Pelagian, then a Unitarian; never finding rest for the sole of his foot; keeping nothing because he has nothing to keep. This Philadelphian church had won the commendation, "Thou hast kept my word." Dear hearer, see that you win it too.

And no doubt also it was intended in this sense—that *they had obeyed*

the word of God. "Thou hast a little strength:" there are very few of you, but you have been observant of all precepts and ordinances. Some think it a great thing to be members of a popular sect, but when the great curtain rolls up, and all things are seen as they are, and not as they seem, do you not think that that church will be most commended which was truest to the teaching of the Holy Spirit in everything? Christian chivalry should make you feel it better to be a member of a church of six doing the Lord's work conscientiously than to be a member of a church of six millions which has turned aside from it. I could not be in communion with a church whose chief guide and authority is another book than God's word, and whose acknowledged Head is other than the Lord Jesus Christ. I had sooner stand alone than yield with a crowd to an Act of Parliament which was passed to dictate to me the form in which I may worship God. There shall come a day when it will be found that the minorities have generally saved both the world and the church. A struggling few may reckon themselves to be the majority when they stand alone *with* God, for HE counts for more than all the myriads of the earth put together. The faithful, staunch, God-fearing men that would not budge an inch, or change a letter, or shape a syllable, to please all the kings and princes of the earth, shall be found to praise and honour in the day of the Lord's appearing. These are the men that Christ shall stoop from his throne to honour: they that have trifled with his word shall be lightly esteemed: they that have wilfully broken one of the least of his commandments, and have taught men so, shall be least in the kingdom of heaven. Blessed and happy shall he be who followeth the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Blessed shall he be who only wanted to know the Lord's will that he might do it unquestioningly, caring nothing what the will of other people might be in the matter.

I shall put it home to you, dear friends, again. You may have but little strength, but *do you keep God's word?* You may never become more numerous, or more influential; but do let it be true of you, that you have kept God's word. Be students of God's word and adherents of it. Take no notice of anything *I* say if it cannot be supported by the word of divine truth. Take equally little notice of what any man says, be he orator, thinker, bishop, or whatever he may be. There is no value in all the brass counters which circulate among the many; they are current with the world, but the Kingdom of God does not know them. The words of men are trifling in value; it takes a mass of them to come to the value of a farthing; but any one word of the Lord is worth a mint of gold. If a doctrine be of God, if it has come out of the loving lips of the Lord Jesus, hold it fast, as for dear life. Let men call you bigot, but never mind, hold you on with all your might, and your Lord will smile upon you.

Thus have I explained what the Philadelphians did. They did it under great disadvantages, but that only helped to increase the weight of praise measured out to them. They had little talent, but they kept God's word. Oh, that men who have ten talents would not be so anxious to be original in their teaching! Oh, that they would cease to display their own thought, their own cleverness, and individuality. If you have little talent, it is a pity you have not more; but still it is

for your praise if you quit yourselves like men, and stand fast in the faith. It may be, you have little strength of mind ; but I hope even then grace enables you to be firm for truth. In other things you may be easily persuaded, and readily talked over ; but be you doubly stanch in the things of God. There make your mark, and put your foot down. Let it be seen that you do not go to be stirred in those vital points, till your friends say of you, "Oh, you can twist William anywhere, but not in his religion. On that point he is a regular Puritan ; there is no moving him." May it always be so ; even if you have but little strength, see to it that you keep Christ's word.

Possibly you have not much strength as to influence: your sphere may be very narrow, and your power in it very slight. That does not matter; but it does matter that you be faithful to your Lord. If you have kept God's word you may be wielding an influence far beyond what you imagine. Good men in the dark days of Popery found out the truth, but they only lived, perhaps, in some quiet village, or shut up in a monastery, and the most they could do was to write down what they knew and so keep it. We have met with instances where they wrote out part of the word of God, and hid it away in a wall ; and afterwards, when the wall was pulled down, the priceless record was discovered and used. Truth does not die through being buried. Some taught the gospel very quietly in their own family circle, and so kept it. Some would get a few copies of the New Testament, and go about and sell them in their baskets; and so they kept the truth. Those men of old time whose influence upon their own age seemed so little, nevertheless prepared the way for those braver spirits who, by-and-by, shone forth like the stars of the morning. Hold fast God's word and never mind what comes of it for the moment ; God's seed may not grow in a day, but it will grow. If you only influence one child, who can tell what that child may be? If you only help to strengthen one solitary Christian woman, who knows what may come to pass by her means ? We see the telegraph wires, but we do not see what messages they may carry. The ropes hang down in our belfry, but the glorious chime is aloft. We cannot see the big bells, but it is ours to pull the ropes that are near our hand, and do what God bids us to do, and music will come of it somewhere. Above all, if we have but little strength of any kind, let us keep God's word.

Now, why should God's word be kept in this way? What is there to praise about keeping God's word? I answer, because *it is a holy thing* to treasure up God's word. I have gone into the churches on the Continent, and I have seen gold and silver plate in the sacristy, understood to be worth one or two or three millions of money. These were said to be the treasures of the church. Why, these are the treasures of men, and they shall pass away. The solid truth of revelation, the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, a divine experience given to you by that Holy Ghost —all this is the treasure of the church, and you are doing a holy thing when you guard it against every adversary. To this purpose are saints sent into the world—to keep this treasure of the church against all adversaries. Truth is the jewel for which all believers must be ready to die. Solomon made shields of gold, which were borne before the king when he went into the house of the Lord; but Rehoboam took away the shields of gold, and put shields of brass in their place. It is to be

feared many are doing the same at this moment. Let us bear our protest: the gold is good enough for us. Do not throw away the best for the sake of getting something that may be newer, but that must be far inferior. I hold one single sentence out of God's word to be of more certainty, and of more power, than all the discoveries of all the learned men of all the ages.

I might have seen the Alexandrian library burned without losing a night's rest, for the mass of its contents must have been mere rubbish; but were there one single verse of the New Testament which it were possible to blot out from human memory and record, one might be willing to lay down his life to save the glorious sentence. The mind of man sends forth pure water and impure, and it is hard to discern between the two; but from the heart of God there wells up, undiluted and unmingled, a stream of living truth which is more for man's benefit than all else out of heaven. Warriors guard kings, and crowns, and thrones; but the living truth of the living God is infinitely more worthy of our watch. Oh for ten thousand valiant men to stand about the bed of the truth, each man with his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night. Therefore, as it is a holy thing, a heavenly thing, a priceless thing, keep you God's word.

Besides, *it is a wise thing*, for you that have but little strength, to keep God's word. The feebler you are the more closely should you keep to the Scriptures. Remember what Solomon says,—"The conies are a feeble folk," but he puts them down as wise people, for they have their habitation in the rocks. If a disputer can once get you away from the Bible, he can swallow you alive; but if you will keep to Scripture, and handle this weapon, "It is written; it is written," the disputer may be the arch-fiend himself, but he cannot possibly get the victory over you. Your wisdom is not to try to gain keenness of mind that you may emulate the critic, but to lay hold upon God's word, and cling to it, for therein shall be your safety and your victory.

Again, dear friends, we ought to hold fast to the truth of God, because, if we have little strength, *it is there that we shall get more strength.* We shall never grow stronger by leaving the eternal word. Nay, but as we cling to God in feebleness, the divine strength of the word is infused into our souls. Besides, God's word is a supporting thing, and he who quits it leaves his chief helper. He that receives it shall live, but without it there is no spiritual life. Therefore let us hold it. If men would take away from us certain dainties which are sweet but which are not needful, we might be content to let them spoil us of such superfluities; but if they come to take away bread and water from the poor and needy, then we cannot have it. For this we must stand up and fight to the death. The word that cometh out of Christ's mouth is the daily manna of our heavenly life, and it behoves every Christian, however feeble or however strong, to keep the word of God with all his might against all comers, since it is his life. I am at this pass, I can sooner die than yield the gospel. I may be a fool, and an old-fashioned bigot, but I am not a turncoat, and I cannot quit the word of the Lord. If I must be the last of the Puritans, I will not be ashamed of it. My Lord will revive his buried truth as sure as he is God: the present madness will cease with its own short hour.

So much, then, with regard to this word of praise.

II. I will not be long on the next point, while I just remind you that there is A WORD OF PROSPECT:—"Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word."

It seems to me to mean just this,—"You have been faithful; therefore I will use you. You have been steadfast; therefore I will employ you." For a considerable period of human life, it may be, God does not give to all of us a field of usefulness, but he provides a field of trial. There are some to whom he early opens the gate of usefulness, because he sees in them a spirit that will bear the temptation of success; but in many other cases it is questionable whether they could bear promotion, and therefore the Lord permits them to be tried in different ways until he sees that they are found faithful, and then he puts them into his service, and gives them an opportunity of bearing witness for him. Now, dear friend, perhaps hitherto you have been perfectly satisfied with holding the truth with all your might, and being faithful to it in private and in your own daily life. I want to suggest to you that if you have done this for some time the era has now arrived when you may go forward to somewhat more. There are opportunities before you now which were not there before: these are placed before *you* especially because you have been tried, and have been proved faithful. If you will now begin to talk to others about that which you love so well, you will be astonished to find how gladly they will receive it from you. You have been a receiver yourself until now, and that is well and good; but, now that you have become filled, overflow to others, and let them receive of your joy. "How do I know that they will accept it?" say you. I know it from this fact—that, as a general rule, the man that keeps God's word has an open door before him. If you have been vacillating and shifty and tricky, and have believed everything and nothing, nobody will take any particular notice of what you say, except it be to shut the door against your uncertain prattle. But when they have observed how you stand to the truth, how solid, and how steadfast you are, they will give over disputing with you, and come to inquire what your views really are. People do not care about knocking their heads against brick walls, or fighting against pillars of iron; and when they see that you are firm and unmoved, they will say, "We must let him have his own way." When a man begins his Christian life in a kind of dubious, half-hearted way, his friends do not know whether he is really going to carry it out or not: at any rate, as he endeavours to avoid all persecution, they do not know what to think of him, and they feel encouraged to treat him as one who can be pressed and squeezed at pleasure. If there is a secret entrance to heaven he prefers it; he means to go round about and climb over the wall somewhere, or sneak in at the back gate. This poor creature has no power or influence; he is rather ridiculous than useful. Nobody ever respects him. Nobody cares a button about him. The devil himself does not trouble him much, for he knows that he will do no harm to his kingdom, let him talk as he likes. But the man who says, "I am going straight for glory, and if anybody is in my way so much the worse for him, for I am bound to take the right road;" such a man will find a pretty clear track. Mr. Moody would

say, "Make a bee line for heaven." A bee knows the nearest way, and keeps to it with all its force. Let me hear each one of you say, "I am not going to take any corners, or twists, or windabouts; but, straight away, what God bids me to do I am going to do; what he bids me believe I am going to believe; and if there is anything to be suffered for it, all right. I have added it all up, and I count the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt." This is the right kind of resolution. God help you to keep to it. Before you, my brother, the Lord God has set an open door. Go ahead! Do not be afraid. People will be willing to hear what you have to say, and, what is more, people will be converted by what you say, for God has set before you this open door, and no man can shut it. It is amazingly easy to go through a door when it is wide open, and it will be very easy to you—much easier than you think, now that you have been schooled by God's Spirit into steadfastness of character, just to say in God's name, dependent upon God's strength, what he has taught you. You will bring many to Christ, because you yourself abide in Christ.

Come, brother, you did not reckon that such usefulness would ever fall to your lot; did you? Cheer up, and get to work. Wake up to holy energy. In the Sunday-school there are little children that you will be the means of bringing to Christ if you take a class; and out at the street corners there are folks that you will turn to the Saviour if you have but the courage to stand up and preach. Out in the villages, or in the crowded city hearts await you. I say not this of you all, but only of confirmed and faithful ones. If you feel, "I never can give up the Bible; I never can forsake the truths that I have learnt from it: they are stamped on my heart, they are cut into the very centre of my soul," then you are the man who may safely go forth to publish the truth. There is an open door before you which no man can shut. Gird up your loins and enter it. Rush to the front. Victory lies before you. God means to use you. You are a vessel fit for the Master's use, and there never was a vessel fit for his use that he did not use one day or other. The hour needs its man quite as much as the man needs the hour. Take time by the forelock and honour your God. The Lord help you to keep his word, and then to go in for public testimony.

III. Our last point was to be A WORD OF PROMISE; for, according to the tenth verse, it is written, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Those who keep God's word, shall themselves be kept from temptation. The Lord returns into his servants' bosoms that which they render to him: he gives keeping for keeping.

Now, I shall speak for myself and for you, and I know that we can bear witness that this promise is true. One says to me, "Are you not perplexed about the prevalence of modern thought—the new phase of divinity that has come up of late, and the general progress that is being made towards a new theology? Does it not trouble you?" Not a bit. Modern ideas do not affect me in the slightest. If all men that live or ever shall live should throw up the old Calvinism, there remains one that will hold it, for this reason—that he could not

hold any other. I must be crushed out of existence before my convictions of the truth of the doctrines of grace in the old-fashioned form can ever be taken from me. I am miserable, wretched, lost if the doctrines of grace be not true. I am joyous, glad, strong, happy if these doctrines be true. I cannot give them up, therefore; and especially because as I read, and the more I read, I perceive these things to be written in the word of God, and therefore I must hold them.

In this church we feel very little of the temptation which tries all the world: very seldom are any of our friends unsettled in their minds, or tormented with these hornets of heresy. "Alas," said one minister to me, "I see some of my best people becoming sceptical; are you not worried by seeing the thoughtful ones drifting off into new views?" "No, not at all." "Why not?" "Because the grace of God keeps our people to their moorings. They know what they believe and they have no desire to change." If a man does not believe the doctrines of grace, he comes to hear me once, and he says, "I am not going there any more." He talks to some of you, and you are so dogmatic, and firmly rooted, he calls you pig-headed, and says it is no use arguing with such bigots; and so he goes to argue somewhere else. This is exactly as we would have it. When a bushel is full of wheat the good corn keeps the chaff out of the measure. This is the Lord's way of delivering those who keep his word: thus he shuts them away from the temptation that comes upon others. He seems to say, "Dear child, since you will not go beyond my written word, you shall not be tempted to go beyond it. I will cause the enemies of the truth to leave you alone. You shall be offensive to them, or they to you, and you shall soon part company." Remember how Mr. Bunyan pictures it. When Talkative came up to gossip with Christian and Hopeful, he chattered away upon all sorts of topics, and they were wearied with him. To get rid of him, Christian said to Hopeful, "Now we will talk a little about experimental godliness;" and when they began to speak about what they had tasted and handled of divine truth, Mr. Chatterbox dropped behind. He did not like spiritual conversation, neither do any of the breed. The holy pilgrims were not so rude as to tell him to go; they only talked about heavenly things, which he did not understand, and he went of his own accord. I believe that result is sure to follow holy conversation and sound preaching. Keep to the truth, and the modern school will give you a wide berth. But if any of you try the double-shuffle in religion—the plan of trying to believe a little of everything and not much of anything—if you try to hold with the hare and run with the hounds, you will be tempted to deadly error, and it will serve you right. In the temptation you will fall, for indeed you are fallen already. Keep the word of God, and the word of God will keep you. You will be shielded from half the temptations that fret and worry professors if you take your place and keep it against all comers.

Or perhaps the text may mean that if the temptation shall come you shall be preserved from it. The deliberately-formed conviction that the word of God is the standard of our faith, and the unwavering habit of referring everything to it and standing and falling by it, may not deliver us from every error, but they will save us from that which is the

nurse and matrix of every error—that is, the habit of trusting to our own understanding, or relying upon the understandings of our fellow-men. I value more a solid confidence in the word of God than even the knowledge that comes out of it; for that faith is a saving habit, a sanctifying habit, in every way a strengthening and confirming and preserving habit. May God grant to us that whatever form of temptation may come upon the face of the earth, we may stand fast for his truth, so that none of us may perish like Judas, the son of perdition.

All this I have spoken to the people of God, but I am not ignorant that there are some here who do not know God's word, nor love it. They have never embraced it, and to them no blessing can come through it. But why should you not receive it? Does it not strike you as being reasonable that, if God has spoken, his creatures ought to believe what he has spoken,—that after he has laid down the law there should remain no room for questioning?

> "This is the judge that ends the strife,
> When wit and reason fail."

Come you, then, and search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Christ; and let it not be said that you will not come unto him that you might have life. As God bears testimony in his word to his own dear Son, believe that testimony; accept the Saviour whom he has given, and find immediate salvation: find it to-night. Go out of the place saying, "I believe it." "He that believeth hath everlasting life," for "this is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." I warrant you if you get faith into your soul, and the word becomes your joy and comfort, you will never let it go. You will sing as we did just now, and as I sang very heartily—

> "Let all the forms that men devise
> Assault my soul with treacherous art,
> I'll call them vanity and lies,
> And bind the gospel to my heart."

So may God bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xvii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—669, 667, 486.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE GREAT BIRTHDAY AND OUR COMING OF AGE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 21ST, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."—Galatians iv. 3—6.

THE birth of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world is a wellspring of pure, unmingled joy. We associate with his crucifixion much of sorrowful regret, but we derive from his birth at Bethlehem nothing but delight. The angelic song was a fit accompaniment to the joyful event, and the filling of the whole earth with peace and good will is a suitable consequence of the condescending fact. The stars of Bethlehem cast no baleful light: we may sing with undivided joy, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." When the Eternal God stooped from heaven and assumed the nature of his own creature who had rebelled against him, the deed could mean no harm to man. God in our nature is not God against us but God with us. We may take up the young child in our arms and feel that we have seen the Lord's salvation; it cannot mean destruction to men. I do not wonder that the men of the world celebrate the supposed anniversary of the great birthday as a high festival with carols and banquets. Knowing nothing of the spiritual meaning of the mystery, they yet perceive that it means man's good, and so in their own rough way they respond to it. We who observe no days which are not appointed of the Lord, rejoice continually in our Prince of Peace, and find in our Lord's manhood a fountain of consolation.

To those who are truly the people of God the incarnation is the subject of a thoughtful joy, which ever increases with our knowledge of its meaning, even as rivers are enlarged by many trickling brooks. The Birth of Jesus not only brings us hope, but the certainty of good things. We do not merely speak of Christ's coming into relation with our nature, but of his entering into union with ourselves, for he has become one flesh with us for purposes as great as his love. He is one with all of us who have believed in his name.

Let us consider by the light of our text the special effect produced upon the church of God by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in

human flesh. You know, beloved, that his coming a second time will produce a wonderful change upon the church. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun." We are looking forward to his second advent for the uplifting of the church to a higher platform than that upon which it now stands. Then shall the militant become triumphant, and the labouring become exultant. Now is the time of battle, but the second advent shall bring both victory and rest. To-day our King commands us to conflict, but soon he shall reign upon Mount Zion, with his ancients gloriously. When he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Then shall the bride adorn herself with her jewels, and stand ready for her Husband. The whole waiting creation which now groaneth and travaileth together in harmony with the birth-pangs of the church shall then come to her time of deliverance, and enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This is the promise of the second advent; but what was the result of the first advent? Did that make any difference in the dispensation of the church of God? Beyond all doubt it did. Paul here tells us that we were minors, in bondage under the elements of the world, until the fulness of time was come, when "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." Some will say, "He is speaking here of the Jews"; but he expressly guards us in the previous chapter against dividing the church into Jews and Gentiles. To him it is only one church, and when he says we were in bondage he is talking to the Galatian Christians, who were many of them Gentiles; but in truth he regards them neither as Jews nor Gentiles, but as part of the one and indivisible church of God. In those ages in which election mainly embraced the tribes of Israel there were always some chosen ones beyond that visible line, and in the mind of God the chosen people were always regarded as neither Jews nor Gentiles, but as one in Christ Jesus. So Paul lets us know that the church up to the time of the coming of Christ was like a child at school under tutors and governors; or like a young man not yet arrived at years of discretion, and therefore most fitly kept under restraint. When Jesus came his great birthday was the day of the coming of age of the church: then believers remained no more children, but became men in Christ Jesus. Our Lord by his first advent brought the church up out of her nonage and her pupilage into a condition of maturity, in which it was able to take possession of the inheritance, and claim and enjoy its rights and liberties. It was a wonderful step from being under the law as a schoolmaster, to come from under its rod and rule into the freedom and power of a full-grown heir; but such was the change for believers of the old time, and in consequence there was a wonderful difference between the highest under the Old Testament and the lowest under the New. Of them that are born of woman there was not born a greater than John the Baptist, and yet the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he. John the Baptist may be compared to a youth of nineteen, still an infant in law, still under his guardian, still unable to touch his estate; but the least believer in Jesus has passed his minority, and is "no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

May the Holy Spirit bless the text to us while we use it thus. First, let us *consider in itself the joyful mission of the Son of God*, and then let

us consider *the joyful result which has come of that mission*, as it is expressed in our text.

I. I invite you to CONSIDER THE JOYFUL MISSION OF THE SON OF GOD. The Lord of heaven has come to earth; God has taken upon himself human nature. Hallelujah!

This great transaction was accomplished at the right time: "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman." The reservoir of time had to be filled by the inflowing of age after age, and when it was full to the brim the Son of God appeared. Why the world should have remained in darkness for four thousand years, why it should have taken that length of time for the church to attain her full age, we cannot tell; but this we are told, that Jesus was sent forth when the fulness of time was come. Our Lord did not come before his time nor behind his time: he was punctual to his hour, and cried to the moment,—"Lo, I come." We may not curiously pry into the reasons why Christ came when he did; but we may reverently muse thereon. The birth of Jesus is the grandest light of history, the sun in the heavens of all time. It is the pole-star of human destiny, the hinge of chronology, the meeting-place of the waters of the past and the future. Why happened it just at that moment? Assuredly it was so predicted. There were prophecies many which pointed exactly to that hour. I will not detain you just now with them; but those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures well know that, as with so many fingers, they pointed to the time when the Shiloh should come, and the great sacrifice should be offered. He came at the hour which God had determined. The infinite Lord appoints the date of every event; all times are in his hand. There are no loose threads in the providence of God, no stitches are dropped, no events are left to chance. The great clock of the universe keeps good time, and the whole machinery of providence moves with unerring punctuality. It was to be expected that the greatest of all events should be most accurately and wisely timed, and so it was. God willed it to be when and where it was, and that will is to us the ultimate reason.

If we might suggest any reasons which can be appreciated by ourselves, we should view the date in reference to the church itself as to the time of her coming of age. There is a measure of reason in appointing the age of twenty-one as the period of a man's majority, for he is then mature, and full grown. It would be unwise to make a person to be of age while only ten, eleven, or twelve; everybody would see that such boyish years would be unsuitable. On the other hand, if we were detained from being of age till we were thirty, every one would see that it was a needless and arbitrary postponement. Now, if we were wise enough, we should see that the church of God could not have endured gospel light earlier than the day of Christ's coming; neither would it have been well to keep her in gloom beyond that time. There was a fitness about the date which we cannot fully understand, because we have not the means of forming so decided an estimate of the life of a church as of the life of a man. God alone knows the times and seasons for a church, and no doubt to him the four thousand years of the old dispensation made up a fit period for the church to abide at school, and bear the yoke in her youth.

The time of coming of age of a man has been settled by law with reference to those that are round about him. It were not meet for servants that the child of five or six should be master: it were not meet in the world of commerce that an ordinary boy of ten or twelve should be a trader on his own account. There is a fitness with reference to relatives, neighbours, and dependants. So was there a fitness in the time when the church should come to her age with regard to the rest of mankind. The world must know its darkness that it might value the light when it should shine forth; the world must grow weary of its bondage that it might welcome the great Emancipator. It was God's plan that the world's wisdom should prove itself to be folly; he meant to permit intellect and skill to play themselves out, and then he would send his Son. He would allow man to prove his strength to be perfect weakness, and then he would become his righteousness and strength. Then, when one monarch governed all lands, and when the temple of war was shut after ages of bloodshed, the Lord whom the faithful sought suddenly appeared. Our Lord and Saviour came when time was full, and like a harvest ready for his reaping, and so will he come again when once more the age is ripe and ready for his presence.

Observe, concerning the first advent, that *the Lord was moving in it towards man.* "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son." We moved not towards the Lord, but the Lord towards us. I do not find that the world in repentance sought after its Maker. No; but the offended God himself in infinite compassion broke the silence, and came forth to bless his enemies. See how spontaneous is the grace of God. All good things begin with him.

It is very delightful that God should take an interest in every stage of the growth of his people from their spiritual infancy to their spiritual manhood. As Abraham made a great feast when Isaac was weaned, so doth the Lord make a feast at the coming of age of his people. While they were as minors under the law of ceremonial observances, he led them about and instructed them. He knew that the yoke of the law was for their good, and he comforted them in the bearing of it; but he was glad when the hour came for their fuller joy. Oh, how truly did the Psalmist say, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" Tell it out with joy and gladness, that the blessings of the new dispensation under which we dwell are the spontaneous gifts of God, thoughtfully bestowed in great love, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. When the fulness of time was come, God himself interposed to give his people their privileges; for it is not his will that any one of his people should miss a single point of blessedness. If we are babes it is not his wish; he would have us men. If we are famished it is not by his desire, he would fill us with the bread of heaven.

Mark the divine interposition,—"God sent forth his Son." I hope it may not seem wearisome to you if I dwell upon that word "sent,"—"God *sent* forth his Son." I take great pleasure in that expression, for it seals the whole work of Jesus. Everything that Christ did was done by commission and authority of his Father. The great Lord, when he was born at Bethlehem, and assumed our nature, did it under divine authorization; and when he came and scattered gifts with both

his hands among the sons of men he was the messenger and ambassador of God. He was the Plenipotentiary of the Court of Heaven. At the back of every word of Christ there is the warrant of the Eternal; at the back of every promise of Christ there is the oath of God. The Son doeth nothing of himself, but the Father worketh with him and in him. O soul, when thou dost lean on Christ thou dost rely upon no amateur Saviour, no uncommissioned Redeemer; but upon One who is sent of the Most High, and therefore is authorised in everything that he does. The Father saith, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him:" for in hearing him you are hearing the Most High. Let us find joy, then, in the coming of our Lord to Bethlehem, because he was sent.

Now run your eye to the next word: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth *his Son.*" *Observe the Divine person who was sent.* God sent not an angel, nor any exalted creature, but "his Son." How there can be a Son of God we know not. The eternal filiation of the Son must for ever remain one of those mysteries into which we must not pry. It were something like the sin of the men of Beth-shemesh if we were to open the ark of God to gaze upon the deep things of God. It is quite certain that Christ is God; for here he is called "his Son." He existed before he was born into this world; for God "sent" his Son. He was already in being or he could not have been "sent." And while he is one with the Father, yet he must be distinct from the Father, and have a personality separate from that of the Father, otherwise it could not be said that God sent his Son. God the Father was not made of a woman, nor made under the law, but only God the Son; therefore, while we know and are assured that Christ is one with the Father, yet is his distinctness of personality most clearly to be observed.

Admire that God should have only one begotten Son, and should have sent him to uplift us. The messenger to man must be none other than God's own Son. What dignity is here! It is the Lord of angels that is born of Mary; it is he without whom was not anything made, who deigns to hang at a woman's breast and to be wrapped in swaddling bands. Oh, the dignity of this, and consequently, oh, the efficiency of it! He that has come to save us is no weak creature like ourselves; he that has taken upon himself our nature is no being of limited strength, such as an angel or a seraph might have been; but he is the Son of the Highest. Glory be to his blessed name! Let us dwell on this with delight.

"If some prophet had been sent
With salvation's joyful news,
Who that heard the blest event
Could their warmest love refuse?

But 'twas he to whom in heaven
Hallelujahs never cease;
He, the mighty God, was given—
Given to us—a Prince of Peace.

None but he who did create us
Could redeem from sin and hell;
None but he could reinstate us
In the rank from which we fell."

Press on, still keeping to the very words of the text, for they are very

sweet. *God sent his Son in real humanity*—"made of a woman." The Revised Version properly hath it, "born of a woman." Perhaps you may get nearer to it if you say, "Made to be born of a woman," for both ideas are present, the *factum* and the *natum*, the being made and the being born. Christ was really and truly of the substance of his mother, as certainly as any other infant that is born into the world is so. God did not create the human nature of Christ apart, and then transmit it into mortal existence by some special means; but his Son was made and born of a woman. He is, therefore, of our race, a man like ourselves, and not man of another stock. You are to make no mistake about it; he is not only of humanity, but of your humanity; for that which is born of a woman is brother to us, be it born when it may. Yet there is an omission, I doubt not intentional, to show how holy was that human nature, for he is born of a woman, not of a man. The Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin, and "that holy thing" was born of her without the original sin which pertains to our race by natural descent. Here is a pure humanity though a true humanity; a true humanity though free from sin. Born of a woman, he was of few days and full of trouble; born of a woman, he was compassed with our physical infirmities; but as he was not born of man he was altogether without tendency to evil or delight therein. I beg you to rejoice in this near approach of Christ to us. Ring out the glad bells, if not in the spires and steeples, yet within your own hearts; for gladder news did never greet your ear than this, that he that is the Son of God was also "made of a woman."

Still further it is added, that God sent his Son "*made under the law*," or born under the law; for the word is the same in both cases; and by the same means by which he came to be of a woman he came under the law. And now admire and wonder! The Son of God has come under the law. He was the Law-maker and the Law-giver, and he is both the Judge of the law and the Executioner of the law, and yet he himself came under the law. No sooner was he born of a woman than he came under the law: this voluntarily and yet necessarily. He willed to be a man, and being a man he accepted the position, and stood in the place of man as subject to the law of the race. When they took him and circumcised him according to the law, it was publicly declared that he was under the law. During the rest of his life you will observe how reverently he observed the commands of God. Even to the ceremonial law as it was given by Moses he had scrupulous regard. He despised the traditions and superstitions of men, but for the rule of the dispensation he had a high respect.

By way of rendering service unto God on our behalf, he came under the moral law. He kept his Father's commandments. He obeyed to the full both the first and the second tables; for he loved God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself. "I delight to do thy will, O my God," saith he, "yea, thy law is within my heart." He could truly say of the Father, "I do always those things that please him." Yet it was a marvellous thing that the King of kings should be under the law; and especially that he should come under the penalty of the law as well as the service of it. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." As our Surety and Substitute he came under the curse of the law;

being made a curse for us. Having taken our place and espoused our nature, though without sin himself, he came under the rigorous demands of justice, and in due time he bowed his head to the sentence of death. "He laid down his life for us." He died the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. In this mystery of his incarnation, in this wonderful substitution of himself in the place of sinful men, lies the ground of that wonderful advance which believers made when Jesus came in the flesh. His advent in human form commenced the era of spiritual maturity and freedom.

II. I ask you now, therefore, in the second place, to CONTEMPLATE THE JOYOUS RESULT WHICH HAS COME OF OUR LORD'S INCARNATION.

I must return to what I have said before—*this coming of Christ has ended the minority of believers.* The people of God among the Jews were before Christ came the children of God; but they were mere babes or little children. They were instructed in the elements of divine knowledge by types, emblems, shadows, symbols: when Jesus was come there was an end of that infantile teaching. The shadows disappear when the substance is revealed; the symbols are not wanted when the person symbolized is himself present. What a difference between the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ when he shows them plainly of the Father and the teaching of the priests when they taught by scarlet wool and hyssop and blood! How different the teaching of the Holy Ghost by the apostles of our Lord, and the instruction by meats and drinks and holy days. The old economy is dim with smoke, concealed with curtains, guarded from too familiar an approach; but now we come boldly to the throne, and all with unveiled face behold as in a glass the glory of God. The Christ has come, and now the Kindergarten school is quitted for the college of the Spirit, by whom we are taught of the Lord to know even as we are known. The hard governorship of the law is over. Among the Greeks, boys and youths were thought to need a cruel discipline: while they went to school they were treated very roughly by their pedagogues and tutors. It was supposed that a boy could only imbibe instruction through his skin, and that the tree of knowledge was originally a birch; and therefore there was no sparing the rod, and no mitigation of self-denials and hardships. This fitly pictures the work of the law upon those early believers. Peter speaks of it as a yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear (Acts xv. 10). The law was given amid thunder and flaming fire; and it was more fitted to inspire a wholesome dread than a loving confidence. Those sweeter truths, which are our daily consolation, were hardly known, or but seldom spoken. Prophets did speak of Christ, but they were more frequently employed in pouring out lamentations and denunciations against children that were corrupters. Methinks, one day with Christ was worth a half century with Moses. When Jesus came, believers began to hear of the Father and his love, of his abounding grace, and the kingdom which he had prepared for them. Then the doctrines of eternal love, and redeeming grace, and covenant faithfulness were unveiled; and they heard of the tenderness of the Elder Brother, the grace of the great Father, and the indwelling of the ever-blessed Spirit. It was as if they had risen from servitude to freedom, from infancy to manhood. Blessed were

they who in their day shared the privilege of the old economy, for it was wonderful light as compared with heathen darkness; yet, for all that, compared with the noontide that Christ brought, it was mere candle-light. The ceremonial law held a man in stern bondage: you must not eat this, and you must not go there, and you must not wear this, and you must not gather that. Everywhere you were under restraint, and walked between hedges of thorn. The Israelite was reminded of sin at every turn, and warned of his perpetual tendency to fall into one transgression or another. It was quite right that it should be so, for it is good for a man that, while he is yet a youth, he should bear the yoke, and learn obedience; yet it must have been irksome. When Jesus came what a joyful difference was made. It seemed like a dream of joy, too glad to be true. Peter could not at first believe in it, and needed a vision to make him sure that it was even so. When he saw that great sheet let down, full of all manner of living creatures and four-footed things, and was bidden to kill and eat, he said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." He was startled indeed when the Lord said, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." That first order of things "stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation;" but Paul saith, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself." Prohibition upon mere ceremonial points, and commands upon carnal matters are now abolished, and great is our liberty: we shall be foolish indeed if we suffer ourselves to be again entangled with the yoke of bondage. Our minority was ended when the Lord, who had aforetime spoken to us by his prophets, at last sent his Son to lead us up to the highest form of spiritual manhood.

Christ came, we are told next, *to redeem those who were under the law;* that is to say, the birth of Jesus, and his coming under the law, and his fulfilling the law, have set all believers free from it as a yoke of bondage. None of us wish to be free from the law as a rule of life; we delight in the commands of God, which are holy, and just, and good. We wish that we could keep every precept of the law, without a single omission or transgression. Our earnest desire is for perfect holiness; but we do not look in that direction for our justification before God. If we be asked to-day, are we hoping to be saved by ceremonies? we answer, "God forbid." Some seem to fancy that baptism and the Lord's Supper have taken the place of circumcision and the Passover, and that while Jews were saved by one form of ceremonial we are to be saved by another. Let us never give place to this idea; no, not for an hour. God's people are saved, not by outward rites, nor forms, nor priestcraft, but because "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," and he has so kept the law that by faith his righteousness covers all believers, and we are not condemned by the law. As to the moral law, which is the standard of equity for all time, it is no way of salvation for us. Once we were under it, and strove to keep it in order to earn the divine favour; but we have now no such motive. The word was, "This do and thou shalt live," and we therefore strove like slaves to escape the lash, and earn our wage; but it is so no longer. Then we strove to do the Lord's will that he might love us, and that we

might be rewarded for what we did; but we have no design of purchasing that favour now, since we freely and securely enjoy it on a very different ground. God loves us out of pure grace, and he has freely forgiven us our iniquities, and this out of gratuitous goodness. We are already saved, and that not by works of righteousness which we have done, or by holy acts which we hope to perform, but wholly of free grace. If it be of grace it is no more of works, and that it is all of grace from first to last is our joy and glory. The righteousness that covers us was wrought out by him that was born of a woman, and the merit by which we enter heaven is the merit, not of our own hands or hearts, but of him that loved us, and gave himself for us. Thus are we redeemed from the law by our Lord's being made under the law; and we become sons and no more servants, because the great Son of God became a servant in our stead.

"What!" saith one; "then do you not seek to do good works?" Indeed we do. We talked of them before, but we actually perform them now. Sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under law, but under grace. By God's grace we desire to abound in works of holiness, and the more we can serve our God the happier we are. But this is not to save ourselves, for we are already saved. O sons of Hagar, ye cannot understand the freedom of the true heir, the child born according to promise! Ye that are in bondage, and feel the force of legal motives, ye cannot understand how we should serve our Father who is in heaven with all our heart and all our soul, not for what we get by it, but because he has loved us, and saved us, irrespective of our works. Yet it is even so; we would abound in holiness to his honour, and praise, and glory, because the love of Christ constraineth us. What a privilege it is to cease from the spirit of bondage by being redeemed from the law! Let us praise our Redeemer with all our hearts.

We are redeemed from the law in its operation upon our mind: it breeds no fear within us now. I have heard children of God say sometimes, "Well, but don't you think if we fall into sin we shall cease to be in God's love, and so shall perish?" This is to cast a slur upon the unchangeable love of God. I see that you make a mistake, and think a child is a servant. Now, if you have a servant, and he misbehaves himself, you say, "I give you notice to quit. There is your wage; you must find another master." Can you do that to your son? Can you do that to your daughter? "I never thought of such a thing," say you. Your child is yours for life. Your boy behaved very badly to you: why did you not give him his wages and start him? You answer, that he does not serve you for wages, and that he is your son, and cannot be otherwise. Just so. Then always know the difference between a servant and a son, and the difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

I know how a base heart can make mischief out of this; but I cannot help it: the truth is the truth. Will a child rebel because he will always be a child? Far from it; it is this which makes him feel love in return. The true child of God is kept from sin by other and better forces than a slavish fear of being turned out of doors by his Father. If you are under the covenant of works, then, mind you, if you do not fulfil all righteousness you will perish: if you are under that covenant, unless you

are perfect you are lost; one sin will destroy you, one sinful thought will ruin you. If you have not been perfect in your obedience, you must take your wages and be gone. If God deals with you according to your works, there will be nothing for you but, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." But if you are God's child, that is a different matter; you will still be his child even when he corrects you for your disobedience.

"Ah," saith one, "then I may live as I like." Listen! If you are God's child, I will tell you how you will like to live. You will desire to live in perfect obedience to your Father, and it will be your passionate longing from day to day to be perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. The nature of sons which grace implants is a law unto itself: the Lord puts his fear into the hearts of the regenerate so that they do not depart from him. Being born again and introduced into the family of God, you will render to the Lord an obedience which you would not have thought of rendering to him if you had only been compelled by the idea of law and penalty. Love is a master force, and he that feels its power will hate all evil. The more salvation is seen to be all of grace, the deeper and more mighty is our love, and the more does it work towards that which is pure and holy. Do not quote Moses for motives of Christian obedience. Do not say, "The Lord will cast me away unless I do this and that." Such talk is of the bondwoman and her son; but it is very unseemly in the mouth of a true-born heir of heaven. Get it out of your mouth. If you are a son you disgrace your Father when you think that he will repudiate his own; you forget your spiritual heirship and liberty when you dread a change in Jehovah's love. It is all very well for a mere babe to talk in that ignorant fashion, and I don't wonder that many professors know no better, for many ministers are only half-evangelical; but you that have become men in Christ, and know that he has redeemed you from the law, ought not to go back to such bondage. "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law."

What else has he come for? Notice further, "*That we might receive the adoption of sons.*" The Lord Jesus Christ has come in human flesh that his people might to the full realise, grasp, and enjoy, "the adoption of sons." I want you this morning to see if you can do that. May the Holy Spirit enable you. What is it to receive the adoption of sons? Why to feel, Now I am under the mastery of love, as a dear child, who is both loved and loving. I go in and out of my Father's house not as a casual servant, called in by the day or the week, but as a child at home. I am not looking for hire as a servant, for I am ever with my Father, and all that he has is mine. My God is my Father, and his countenance makes me glad. I am not afraid of him, but I delight in him, for nothing can separate me from him. I feel a perfect love that casteth out fear, and I delight myself in him. Try now and enter into that spirit this morning. That is why Christ has come in the flesh—on purpose that you, his people, may be to the full the adopted children of the Lord, acting out and enjoying all the privileges which sonship secures to you.

And then, next, exercise your heirship. One who is a son, and knows he is an heir of all his father's estates, does not pine in poverty, nor act

like a beggar. He looks upon everything as his own ; he regards his father's wealth as making him rich. He does not feel that he is stealing if he takes what his father has made to be his own, but he makes free with it. I wish believers would make free with the promises and blessings of their God. Help yourselves, for no good thing will the Lord withhold from you. All things are yours : you only need to use the hand of faith. Ask what thou wilt. If you appropriate a promise it will not be pilfering : you may take it boldly and say, "This is mine." Your adoption brings with it large rights : be not slow to use them. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Among men, sons are only heirs, heirs in possession, when the father is dead ; but our Father in heaven lives, and yet we have full heirship in him. The Lord Jesus Christ was made of a woman on purpose that his dear people might at once enter into their heirship.

You ought to feel a sweet joy in the perpetual relationship which is now established between you and God, for Jesus is still your brother. You have been adopted, and God has never cancelled adoption yet. There is such a thing as regeneration, but there is not such a thing as the life then received dying out. If you are born unto God you are born unto God. The stars may turn to coals, and the sun and moon may become clots of blood, but he that is born of God has a life within him which can never end: he is God's child, and God's child he shall be. Therefore let him walk at large like a child, an heir, a prince of the blood royal, who bears a relationship to the Lord which neither time nor eternity can ever destroy. This is why Jesus was made of a woman and made under the law, that he might give us to enjoy the fulness of the privilege of adopted sons.

Follow me a minute a little further. The next thing that Christ has brought us by being made of a woman is, "Because ye are sons, God *hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.*" Here are two sendings. God sent his Son, and now he sends his Spirit. Because Christ has been sent, therefore the Spirit is sent; and now you shall know the Holy Ghost's indwelling because of Christ's incarnation. The Spirit of light, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of liberty, the same Spirit that was in Christ Jesus is in you. That same Spirit which descended upon Jesus in the waters of baptism has also descended upon you. You, O child of God, have the Spirit of God as your present guide and Comforter ; and he shall be with you for ever. The life of Christ is your life, and the Spirit of Christ is your Spirit ; wherefore, this day be exceeding glad, for you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption.

There we finish, for Jesus has come *to give us the cry* as well as the spirit of adoption, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father." According to ancient traditions no slave might say, "Abba, Father," and according to the truth as it is in Jesus none but a man who is really a child of God, and has received the adoption, can truly say, "Abba, Father." This day my heart desires for every one of you, my brethren, that because Christ has been born into the world you may at once come of age, and may at this hour confidently say, "Abba, Father." The great God, the Maker of heaven and earth, is my Father, and I dare avow it without fear that he will disown the kindred. The Thunderer, the ruler of the

stormy sea, is my Father, and notwithstanding the terror of his power I draw near to him in love. He who is the Destroyer, who says, "Return, ye children of men," is my Father, and I am not alarmed at the thought that he will call me to himself in due time. My God, thou who shalt call the multitudes of the slain from their graves to live, I look forward with joy to the hour when thou shalt call and I shall answer thee. Do what thou wilt with me, thou art my Father. Smile on me; I will smile back and say, "My Father." Chasten me, and as I weep I will cry, "My Father." This shall make everything work good to me, be it never so hard to bear. If thou art my Father all is well to all eternity. Bitterness is sweet, and death itself is life, since thou art my Father. Oh, trip ye merrily home, ye children of the living God, saying each one within himself, "I have it, I have it. I have that which cherubim before the throne have never gained; I have relationship with God of the nearest and the dearest kind, and my spirit for her music hath this word, 'Abba, Father; Abba, Father.'"

Now, dear children of God, if any of you are in bondage under the law, why do you remain so? Let the redeemed go free. Are you fond of wearing chains? Are you like Chinese women that delight to wear little shoes which crush their feet? Do you delight in slavery? Do you wish to be captives? You are not under the law, but under grace; will you allow your unbelief to put you under the law? You are not a slave. Why tremble like a slave? You are a child; you are a son; you are an heir; live up to your privileges. Oh, ye banished seed, be glad! You are adopted into the household of God; then be not as a stranger. I hear Ishmael laughing at you: let him laugh. Tell your Father of him, and he will soon say, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." Free grace is not to be mocked by human merit; neither are we to be made sad by the forebodings of the legal spirit. Our soul rejoices, and, like Isaac, is filled with holy laughter; for the Lord Jesus has done great things for us whereof we are glad. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Galatians iii. 24—29; iv.; v. 1—4.

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